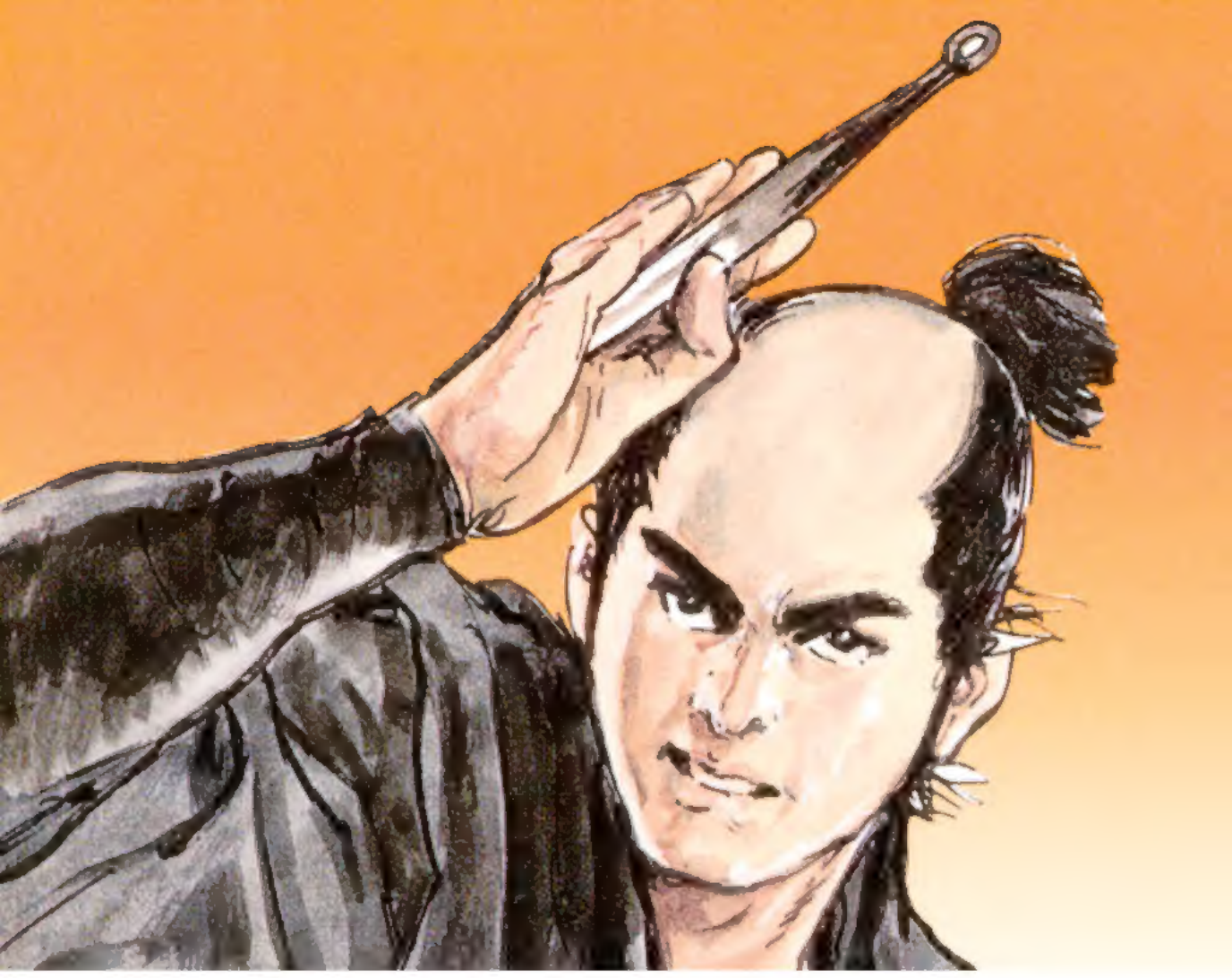


半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 5

BATTLE OF ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

story
KAZUO KOIKE

art
GOSEKI KOJIMA

®
DARK HORSE MANGA™

translation
NAOMI KOKUBO
with assistance by **JEFF CARLSON**

lettering and retouch
SNO CONE STUDIOS

publisher
MIKE RICHARDSON

editor
TIM ERVIN

book design
DARIN FABRICK

art director
LIA RIBACCHI

Published by Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
in association with Soeisha Inc.

Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie OR 97222
www.darkhorse.com

First edition: March 2007
ISBN-10: 1-59307-506-5 ISBN-13: 978-1-59307-506-4

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Canada

Path of the Assassin Vol. 5: Battle of One Hundred and Eight Days
Path of the Assassin © 1972, 2007 by KAZUO KOIKE/GOSEKI KOJIMA. All rights reserved. Originally published in Japan in 2000 by KOIKE SHOIN PUBLISHING CO., LTD. English translation rights arranged with SOEISHA, INC. Translation and adaptation, and all other material unless otherwise specified, ™ & © 2007 Dark Horse Comics, Inc. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the express written permission of the copyright holders. Names, characters, places, and incidents featured in this publication are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, institutions, or locales, without satiric intent, is coincidental. Dark Horse Manga™ is a trademark of Dark Horse Comics, Inc. All rights reserved.

To find a comics shop in your area, call the
Comic Shop Locator Service toll-free at 1-888-266-4226

半蔵の門

BATTLE OF ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

5

"A man's nature can never change.
No matter how hard he tries."

Upon the death of Imagawa Yoshimoto, Motoyasu returns to Okayama and changes his name to Ieyasu. Meanwhile, Hanzō marries Takeda's *suppa*, Tsukumo. He also recovers Tsukiyama *gozen* along with Ieyasu's children by successfully pulling off a hostage exchange scheme. However, in the process, he witnesses an affair between Ujizane and Tsukiyama. Concerned that Tsukiyama might be impregnated with Ujizane's child, Hanzō asks her not to sleep with Ieyasu for ten months. He also agrees to stay away from Ieyasu during that time—only to find out there is a new challenge awaiting him.

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter on Relinquishing Paths

No. 6: Departing Sleep and the Logic of Sleep 3

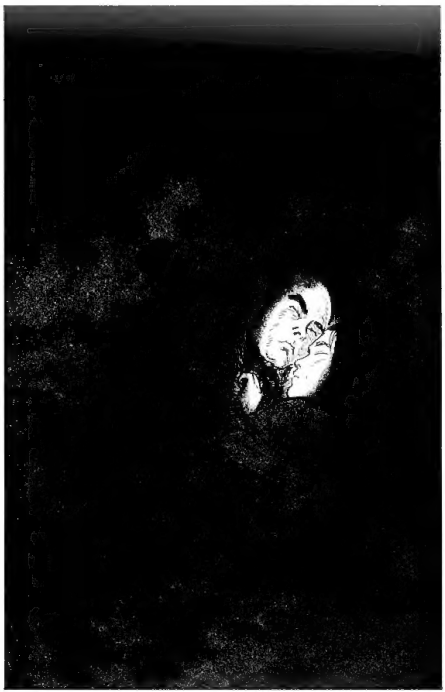
No. 7: Battle of One Hundred and Eight Days 65

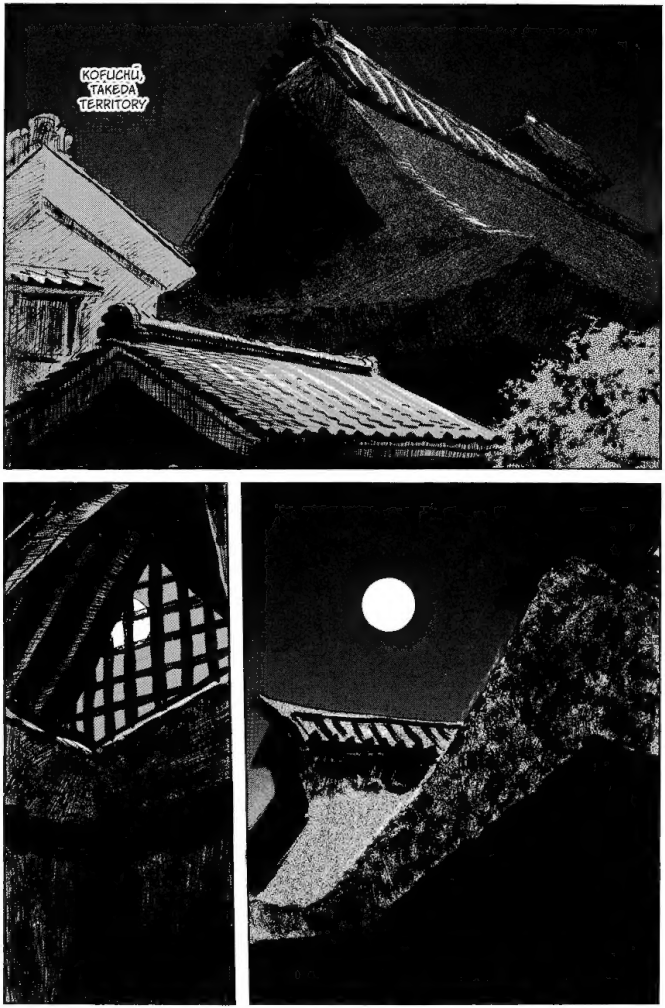
Glossary 309

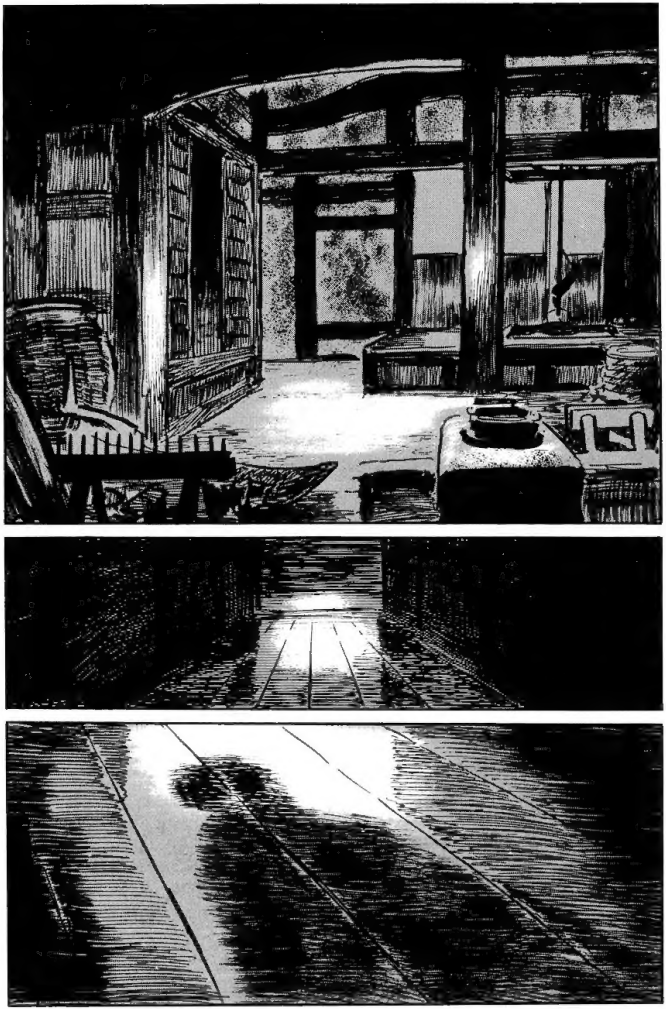
Creator Profiles 311

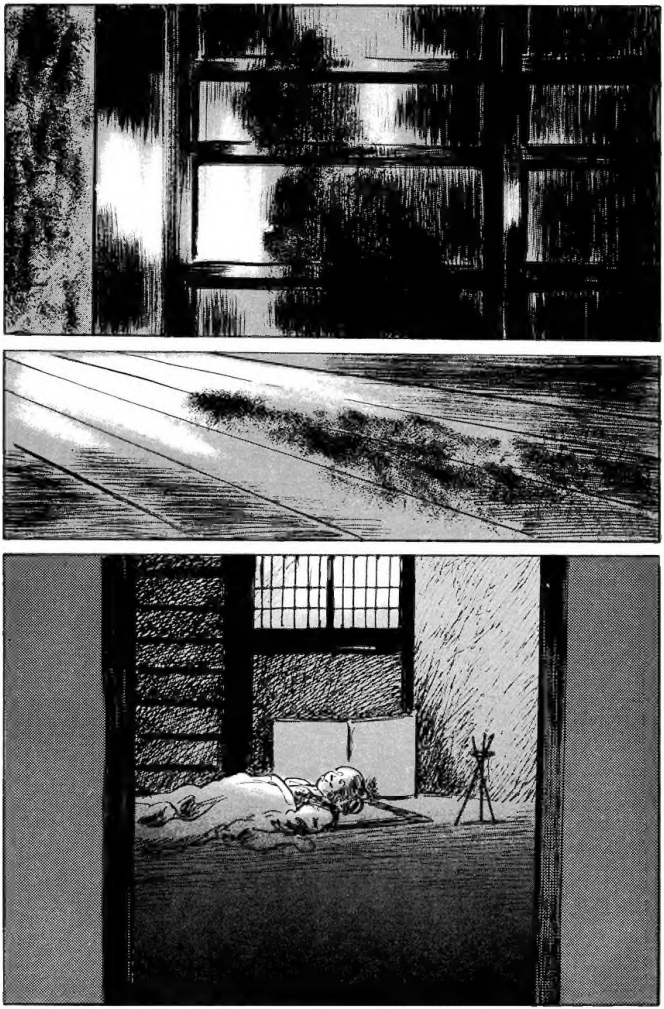
Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

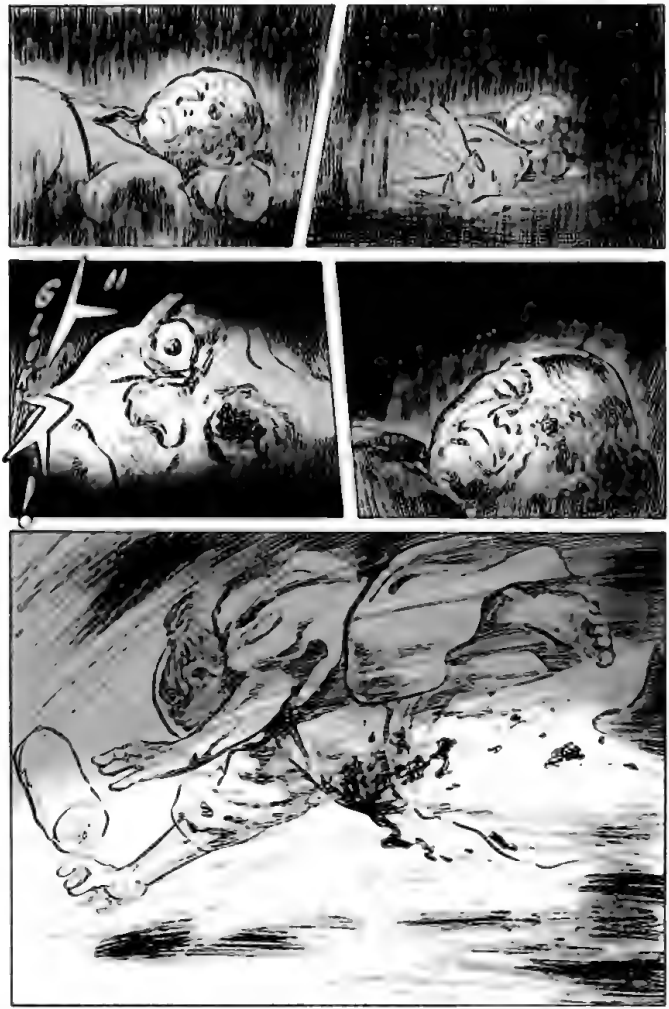
No. 6: Departing Sleep and the Logic of Sleep

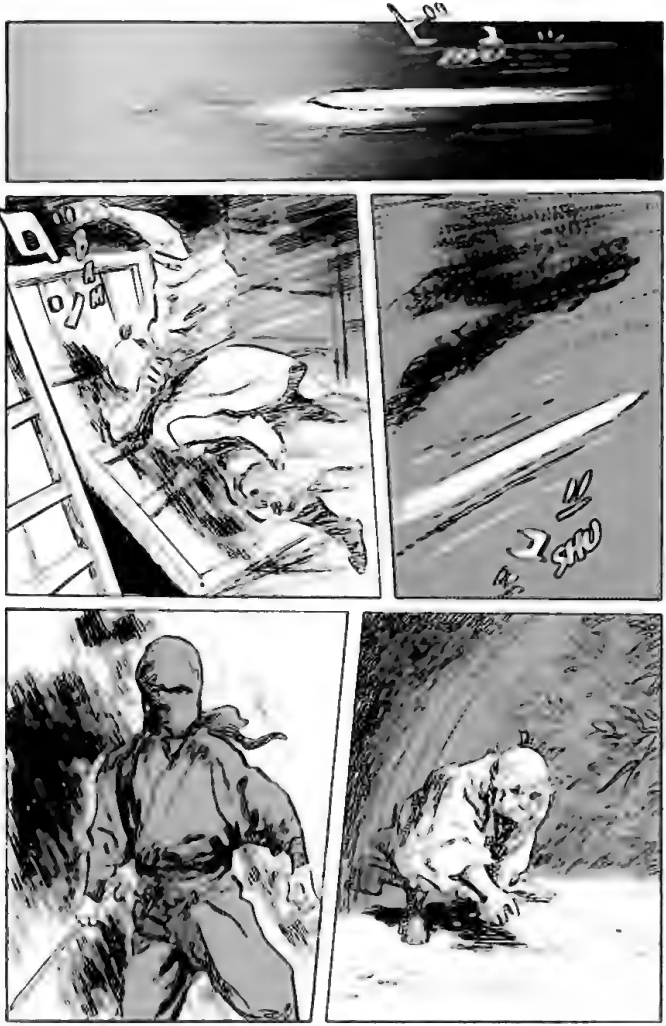



KOFUCHŪ,
TAKEDA
TERRITORY

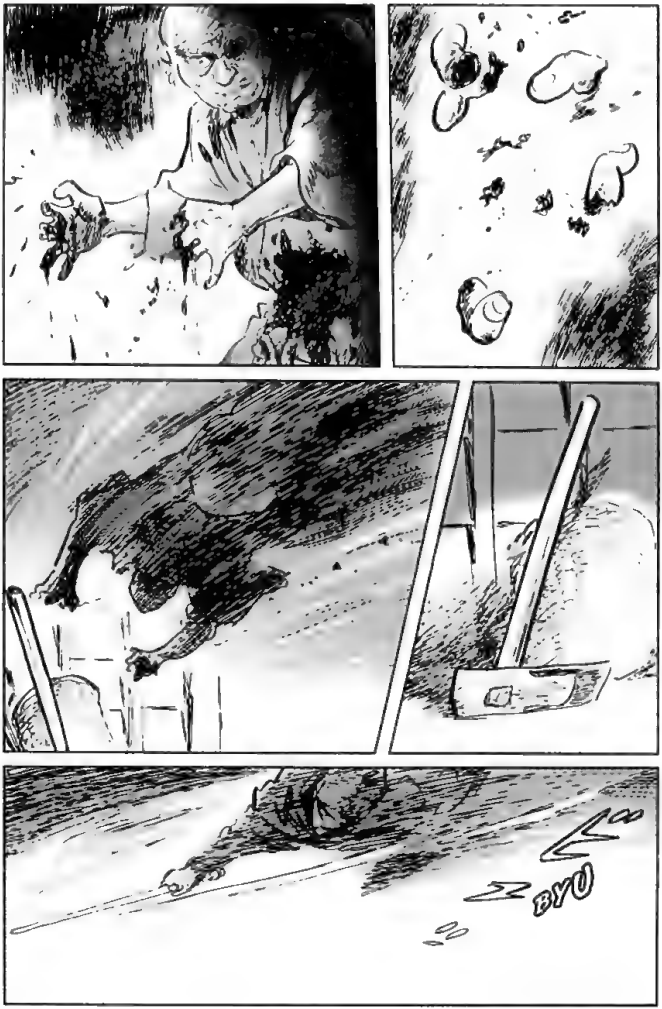


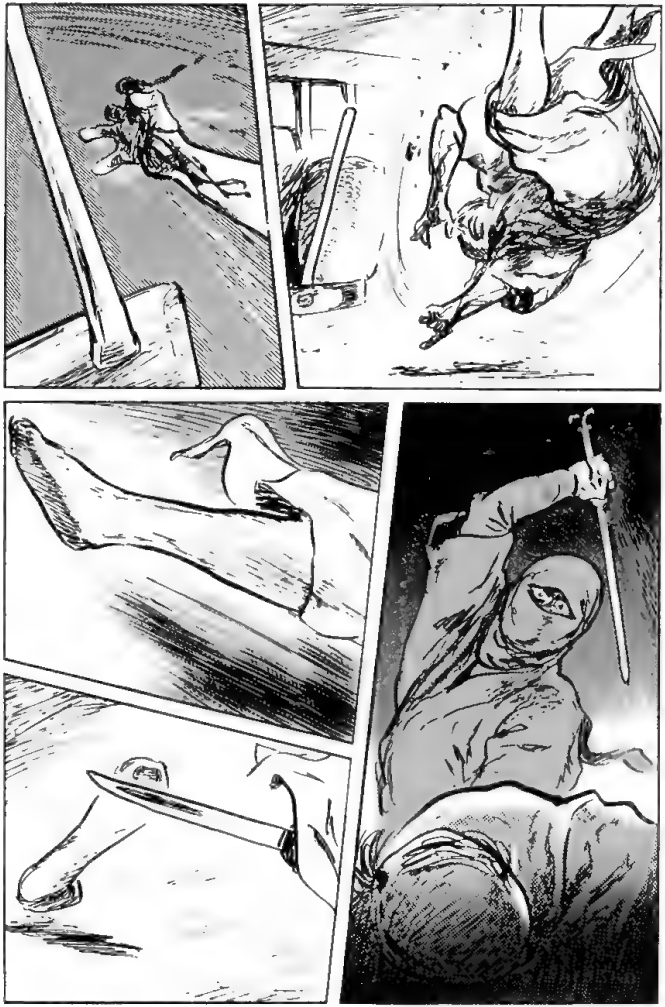



"ick!"


SHU

KOKEKEKE
KOKEKEKE
GYAA


BYO



GOGOGO
SHOK
DOZU

THE SWORD IN MY LEG ONLY WORKS ONCE.
I HAD IT DONE FOR YOU.

MM...
KNOWING THAT, THIS WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD BAIT YOU-- AND BURY YOU. THAT'S WHY I DID NOT HAVE ANY OF MY MEN LIVE HERE.
YOU'RE AFTER ME AND *OYAKATASAMA*. YOU HAVE THIS SNAKE-LIKE TENACITY, AND YOUR MASTERFUL SKILLS ARE THE BEST OF OUR TIME. BESIDES, YOU ARE CAREFUL.
SAY WHAT YOU WANT! ONCE I KILL YOU, I'M HALFWAY TO MY GOAL.
IT WAS YOUR FOLLY TO THINK I WAS BEING NEGLIGENT.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU WITH EVERY READINESS TO DIE
YOU'VE GROWN SENILE, DANZŌ DON'T YOU SEE HOW I'M USING MY LIFE FOR *OYAKATASAMA'S* SAFETY?
I AM THE IMMORTAL KITE KATŌ THE SLASH YOU GAVE ME IS JUST A SCRATCH ANYWAY
THE VENOM FROM A GOLD *HABU* WAS APPLIED TO THIS SWORD
GAK.

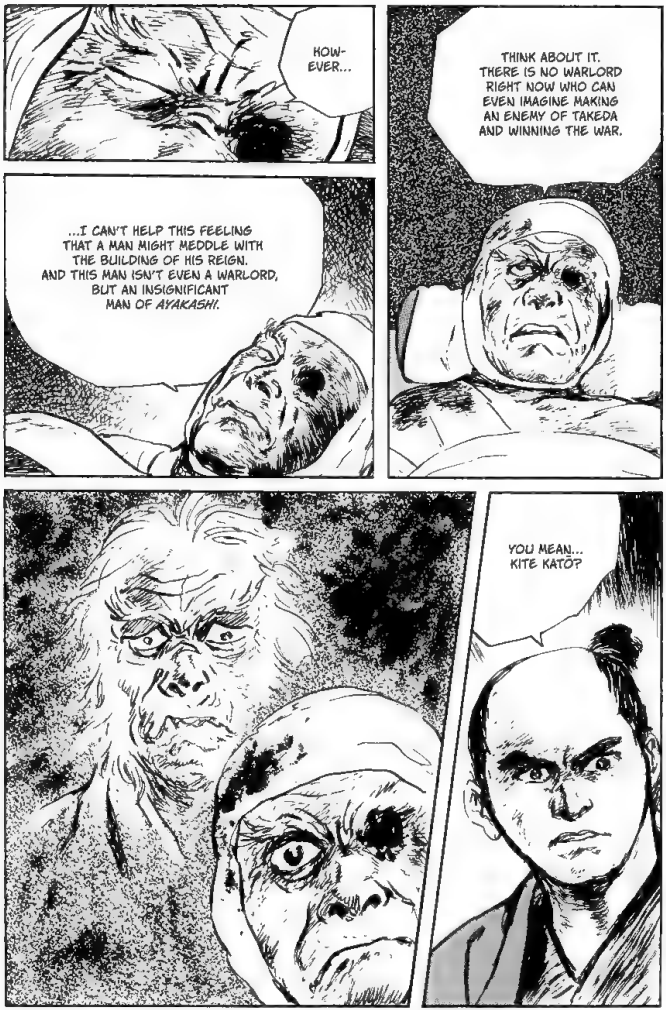
I CAN LIVE THREE MORE DAYS AT LEAST.
URK... EVEN A LIE IS USEFUL AT TIMES.

TSUKUMO-SAMA, YOUR FATHER WAS ATTACKED.
HE MAY LAST THREE DAYS OR SO FROM THE MORTAL WOUND.
HE SENT US TO ASK YOU AND HATTORI-DONO TO COME SEE HIM.

DO NOT LOSE YOUR HEAD!!
FATHER!

WHO DID THIS TO YOU?
YOU MAY THINK NO ONE CAN FORETELL IT-- THAT THERE'S NO ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION.
HANZŌ-*DONO*, WHO DO YOU THINK WILL SEIZE CONTROL OF THE NATION AND ESTABLISH A NEW REIGN?
IT'S MY *OYAKATASAMA*.
BUT I KNOW. I CAN SEE IT CLEARLY.

YOU MAY THINK I SAY NO JUST BECAUSE IT SUITS ME WELL BUT I HAVE SUBSTANTIAL FACTS TO SUPPORT MY CONVICTION
FIRST OF ALL NO WARLORD CAN MATCH OYAKATAKARA'S FOR HIS WEAL AND HIS POWERS OF OBSERVATION IN HANDLING THE ART OF WAR OR THE STRENGTH OF TAKEDA'S ARMED FORCES


HOW-
EVER...
THINK ABOUT IT.
THERE IS NO WARLORD
RIGHT NOW WHO CAN
EVEN IMAGINE MAKING
AN ENEMY OF TAKEDA
AND WINNING THE WAR.
...I CAN'T HELP THIS FEELING
THAT A MAN MIGHT MEDDLE WITH
THE BUILDING OF HIS REIGN.
AND THIS MAN ISN'T EVEN A WARLORD,
BUT AN INSIGNIFICANT
MAN OF AYAKASHI.
YOU MEAN...
KITE KATŌ?

URG...
YES, IT WAS DANZŌ, THE KITE KATŌ.
TH.. THEN THE MAN WHO ATTACKED YOU WAS...
HANZŌ-DONO, YOU NEVER FAIL TO IMPRESS ME.
I FOUGHT HIM.
HAVE YOU MET KIM BEFORE?!

WHAT A KARMA THIS IS.
I ESCAPED BY ENTERING THE SEA.
DANZŌ FOUGHT YOU, HANZŌ-*DONO*, AND THEN HE ATTACKED ME, AND IT IS YOU, HANZŌ-*DONO*, WHO WILL TERMINATE HIM.
HE WILL, WITHOUT FAIL.
IF YOU DON'T TAKE HIM OUT, HE WILL ATTACK *OYAKATASAMA*.

AND IF THAT HAPPENS, ODA WILL END UP TAKING THE NATION.
BECAUSE OF THAT MAN, OYAKATASAMA'S LIFE MIGHT END BEFORE HE CAN LEAD THE COUNTRY, AND TAKEDA WOULD FALL.
HE STEALS IN WITHOUT SHOWING ANY HINT OF HIS PRESENCE. AND HIS SPEED! IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO FOLLOW EVEN WITH MY EYE.
THAT'S WHY I PLOTTED TO LURE HIM OUT WITH MY LIFE, AND KILL HIM. BUT WHAT A TERRIBLE SPECTER HE IS.
IF HE ALLIES WITH TAKEDA INSTEAD OF ODA, HE'LL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE FOR TOMORROW. LISTEN, KANZÔ! ENGRAVE THIS ONE THING IN YOUR HEART.
WHAT ABOUT MY MASTER?
I'M DEFEATED!

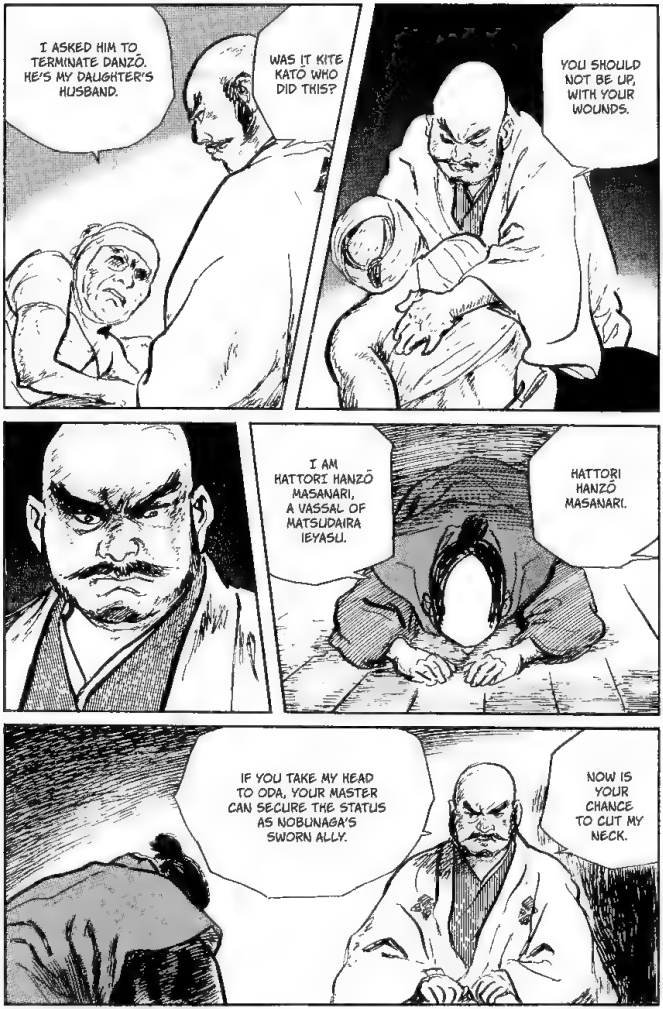
A MAN'S
WORTH IS AN
NEVER-ENDING
MYSTERY
NO MATTER
HOW HE TRIES
NEBUCHADNEZZAR IS
HERE TO RULE
WHEN A KING'S
AND
ARE
NOT
EXCEPT HIMSELF
EVEN HIS VASSALS WILL FALL
AND
THAT THEY'RE ALREADY OVER
WHO
NAME
SOME OF THEM WILL
BETRAY HIM TOO

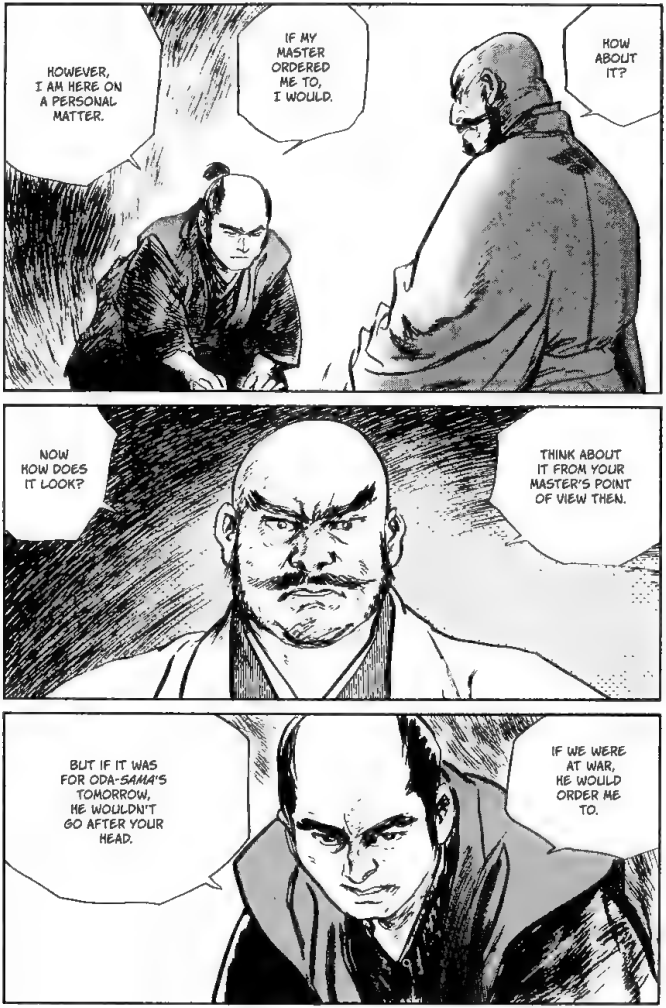
NOW THAT HE TOOK OUT IMAGAWA, HIS NATURE HAS BECOME EVEN MORE EXACERBATED. IF HE SEIZES THE COUNTRY, AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF INNOCENT BLOOD IS LIKELY TO SPILL.
HANZŌ-*DONO*, IF YOUR MASTER ALLIES WITH NOBUNAGA, THE DAY IS SURE TO COME WHEN HE TASTES DEADLY MISERY.
AND YET, HIS REIGN WON'T LAST VERY LONG. HE IS EXCELLENT AT WAR, BUT HE IS NOT SUITED TO BE A RULER.
IT'S FOR YOUR MASTER, TOO!
THAT'S WHY, FOR THE SAKE OF THE WHOLE COUNTRY, OUR *OYAKATASAMA* HAS TO RULE.

I'M NOT SAYING THIS FOR TAKEDA OR FOR ODA BUT FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY.
HANZŌ-DONO, TERMINATE DANZŌ!

PLEASE, I'M COUNTING ON YOU, HANZÔ-DONO! THERE'S NO ONE ELSE WHO CAN...
P...
IF YOU DON'T KILL THAT SPECTER, THIS NATION WILL BE THROWN INTO GREAT DISORDER WITH NO RULER FOR TOO LONG, AND EVERYONE WILL BECOME A VICTIM OF WAR.
ALTHOUGH THE FORCEFUL WORDS OF KANSUKE DROVE HIM TO AGREE, HIS HEART HESITATED, BECAUSE HE HAD A MASTER AND THAT MEANT HE WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO ACT ALONE.
YES, SIR.
...TAKE HIM OUT!

KANSUKE, LIE DOWN.


I ASKED HIM TO TERMINATE DANZŌ. HE'S MY DAUGHTER'S HUSBAND.
WAS IT KITE KATŌ WHO DID THIS?
YOU SHOULD NOT BE UP, WITH YOUR WOUNDS.
I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, A VASSAL OF MATSUDAIRA IEYASU.
HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.
IF YOU TAKE MY HEAD TO ODA, YOUR MASTER CAN SECURE THE STATUS AS NOBUNAGA'S SWORN ALLY.
NOW IS YOUR CHANCE TO CUT MY NECK.


HOWEVER, I AM HERE ON A PERSONAL MATTER.
IF MY MASTER ORDERED ME TO, I WOULD.
HOW ABOUT IT?
NOW HOW DOES IT LOOK?
THINK ABOUT IT FROM YOUR MASTER'S POINT OF VIEW THEN.
BUT IF IT WAS FOR ODA-SAMA'S TOMORROW, HE WOULDN'T GO AFTER YOUR HEAD.
IF WE WERE AT WAR, HE WOULD ORDER ME TO.

...THINKING WE MIGHT COME AFTER HIS LIFE NEXT.
IF HE DID, IT'S MORE LIKELY FOR ODA-SAMA TO BECOME SUSPICIOUS OF MY MASTER...
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
CLEAR ANSWER.

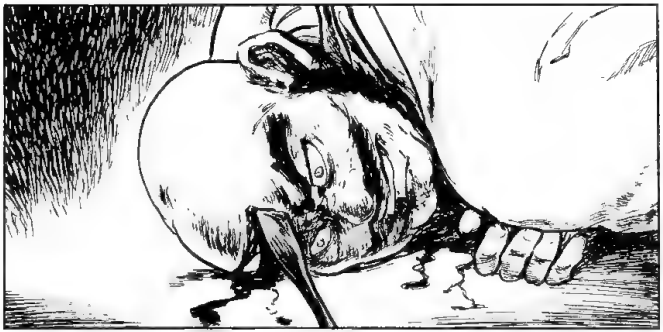
HA HA HA HA HA!
HA HA HA HA HA!
HA...

HE CAME.

UGH...

GLORK
HOGH
GOBB

SHLOK
THIS MAN IS NOT OYAKATASAMA BUT HIS SHADOW.



I KNEW HE'D RETURN AND STRIKE AGAIN AS SOON AS HE REALIZED I LIED.
I GOT RID OF DANZŌ BY TELLING HIM THAT THE VENOM FROM A GOLD *HABU* WAS APPLIED TO THE SWORD IN MY LEG.

IF SO, IT WAS OBVIOUS FOR *OYAKATASAMA* TO PAY HIS RESPECTS.
I MAY LAST TWO MORE DAYS.
WHICH MADE IT A PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR DANZO.

I KNEW HE WOULDN'T LET THIS CHANCE SLIP. THAT'S WHY I HAD THE SHADOW VISIT, AND TOLD THIRTEEN OF MY TOP MEN TO HIDE OUTSIDE TO FORM A KEKKAI BARRIER.
UGH
GLORTCH
HE IS AS GHASTLY AN OPPONENT AS THAT.
IT'S JUST THAT, IT IS MY EARNEST DESIRE TO SEND HIM TO HIS GRAVE, WHATEVER IT TAKES.
IT'S NOT THAT I DECEIVED YOU, HANZŌ-DONO.
DANZŌ, TOO, IS SEVERELY INJURED, AND SO I WASN'T SURE IF HE'D ACTUALLY SHOW UP.
GYAH
SHHLOCH

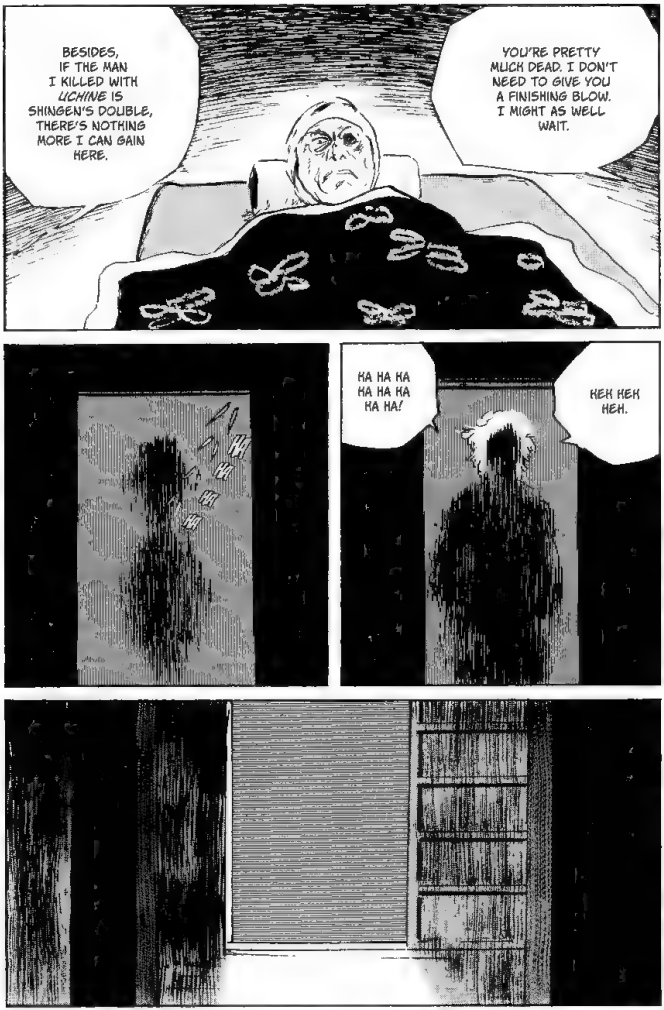
BUT HE DID COME! WHAT A TERRIBLE BEAST HE IS, INDEED.
ONLY ONE LEFT...
HMM.
HE ALWAYS LOOKS A FEW STEPS AHEAD... BUT EVEN HE WOULDN'T DREAM OF FINDING HATTORI HANZÖ IN HERE.
HE WILL ENTER TO CONFIRM HIS SUCCESS.

HE IS FAST BECAUSE HE TRANSFORMS INTO THE NOTHINGNESS OF THE WIND.
HE IS AS VIOLENT AS FIRE BECAUSE HE IS POSSESSED BY THE IDEA OF VENGEANCE.
I BET HE'LL THINK YOU'RE ONE OF MY MEN. THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL HAVE YOUR WINNING CHANCE.
AND YET THE MOMENT HE SEES YOU, HANZÔ-*DONO*, HE'LL WONDER WHY YOU'RE HERE. WHY IS A *SHINOBI* OF MATSUDAIRA HERE? AND WITH ME, OF ALL MEN OF TAKEDA? HE'LL BE SUSPICIOUS.
WHEN THAT HAPPENS, HE'S NO MORE THAN AN OLD MAN. IT SHOULDN'T BE HARD TO BEAT HIM.
THAT'S WHEN THE WIND AND THE FIRE BECOME A MERE HUMAN.

HE'LL COME IN, HANZO-DONO.
IT SOUNDS LIKE THE LAST ONE IS DEAD.
TAK
OH NO!
AH! D... DON'T!
100

NO WONDER YOU'RE THE MILITARY ADVISOR OF TAKEDA.
HEH HEH HEH. YOU LIED AND SET A TRAP, KANSUKE.
HEH HEH HEH.

KANSUKE, YOU'VE GROWN OLD, TO BLOW OUT THE LIGHT LIKE THAT. IF THE MAN I KILLED WAS THE SHINGEN HIMSELF, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU HAD SHINGEN'S DOUBLE AS PART OF YOUR PLOT TO KILL ME. BUT YOU'VE FALLEN SHORT.
HEH HEH HEH. YOU CAN'T PLAY THAT TRICK ON ME.
GOING DARK IS AS GOOD AS TELLING ME THAT YOU'VE PLANNED TO KILL ME BY LURING ME INSIDE.
IF SHINGEN HAD DIED, THE LIGHT WOULD'VE MADE NO DIFFERENCE. BECAUSE, AT THAT POINT, YOU WOULDN'T CARE IF I LIVED OR DIED.


BESIDES, IF THE MAN I KILLED WITH *UCHINE* IS SHINGEN'S DOUBLE, THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN GAIN HERE.
YOU'RE PRETTY MUCH DEAD. I DON'T NEED TO GIVE YOU A FINISHING BLOW. I MIGHT AS WELL WAIT.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!
HEH HEH HEH.

I WILL TERMINATE KITE KATŌ...
TSUKUMO'S MISTAKE IS MINE AS WELL.
IT'S FINE. IT'S FATE.
F... FATHER...
HANZŌ-DONO.
...WITHOUT FAIL. PLEASE SET YOUR HEART AT REST.
IT'S A DOWRY, FOR THE GROOM WHO TOOK MY DAUGHTER AS HIS BRIDE.
LET ME TEACH YOU A TRICK.

PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO REACH TOMORROW BY SLEEPING. SO LONG AS YOU ARE HUMAN, YOU SLEEP NEARLY HALF YOUR LIFE.
THAT MEANS, IF YOU ARE TO LIVE FIFTY YEARS, TWENTY OF IT IS SPENT AT REST.
WHILE YOU ARE ASLEEP, YOU LOSE YOUR IDENTITY AND BECOME UNCONSCIOUS. IT'S NO DIFFERENT FROM BEING DEAD.

A MAN'S LIFE IS VERY SHORT INDEED.
IT'S NATURAL FOR MEN TO FIGHT WHILE THEY'RE ALIVE. BUT THE FIRST PREREQUISITE OF A *SHINOBI* IS TO FIGHT EVEN WHEN HE IS ASLEEP.

A MAN IS A *SHINOBI* FOR THE VERY REASON THAT HE CAN FIGHT EVEN WHEN HE IS ASLEEP. NOW, *HANZŌ-DONO*, CAN YOU FIGHT EVEN WHEN YOU ARE ASLEEP?
ANYONE CAN FIGHT WHEN HE'S AWAKE.
WHAT IF YOUR OPPONENT HAS HAD AS MUCH PASSIVE TRAINING AS YOU HAVE?
THAT'S A CONFIDENCE DERIVED FROM PASSIVE TRAINING. BUT WHAT ABOUT ATTACKING SOMEONE IN HIS SLEEP?
YES.
I BELIEVE I'VE TRAINED MYSELF TO DO THAT. I'M CONFIDENT I CAN WAKE MYSELF BY SENSING THE PRESENCE OF ANYONE WHO COMES NEAR.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?
I IMAGINE YOU'D BE BOTH AWAKE BEFORE YOU FIGHT. BUT THAT WON'T MAKE YOU A *SHINOBI*.
I'M NOT SO CONFIDENT.

THAT'S WHY I'LL TEACH YOU THIS.
IF YOU ARE TO STRIKE USING THE LOGIC OF SLEEP, JUDGE THE STATE OF THE SLEEPER BY HIS AGE AND SIZE.
AN OLD MAN'S BODY CAN RETAIN MOISTURE AND WARMTH ONLY A LITTLE, THUS IT'S EASY TO BECOME THIRSTY AND COLD. IT'S RARE FOR HIM TO SLEEP DEEPLY.

SO OFTEN TIMES, AN OLD MAN WILL SLEEP UNTIL MIDNIGHT AND STAY AWAKE THE REST.
FURTHERMORE, AN ANXIOUS MIND HARDLY SLEEPS, WHILE A LIGHTHEARTED AND SERENE MIND SLEEPS WELL.
A YOUNG MAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS TOO MUCH ENERGY, SO HE SLEEPS WELL LATER IN THE NIGHT TOWARDS MORNING. THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OLD AND YOUNG.
A FAT MAN CAN RETAIN LOTS OF MOISTURE, AND HE SLEEPS WELL. THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE WITH A THIN MAN.

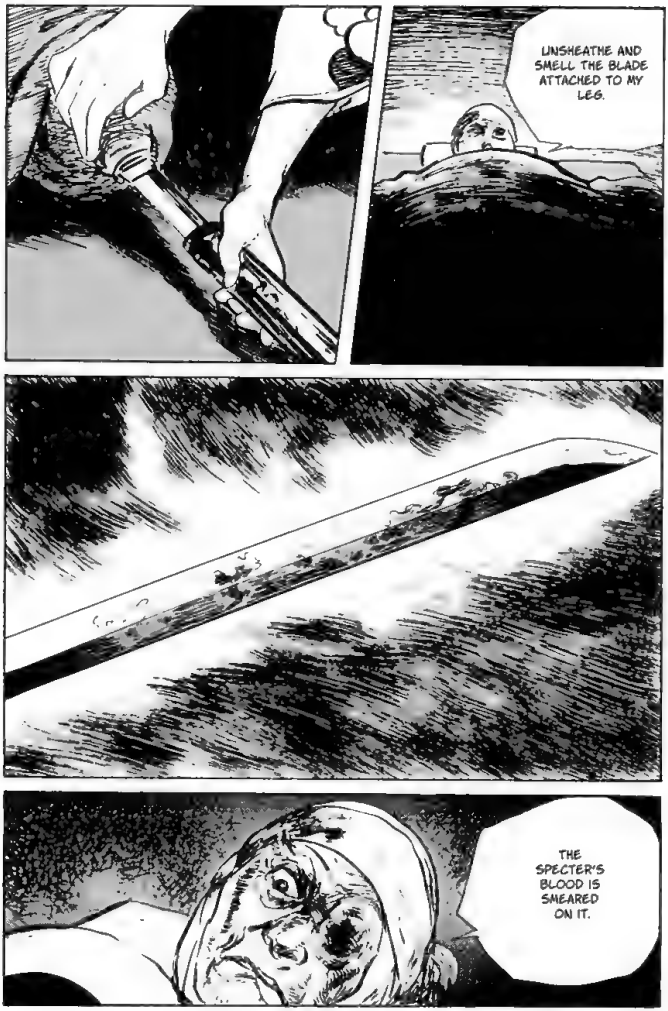
A MAN WHO IS POLITE, DETERMINED, AND ALWAYS MODEST DOES NOT LOOSEN HIS SASH WHEN HE LIES TO SLEEP...
...WEARS LIGHT CLOTHES, ISN'T BOTHERED BY THE COLD, DOES NOT DRINK NOR EAT IN EXCESS, ABSTAINS FROM LEWD ACTIVITIES AND IS PREPARED TO FACE ANYTHING-- SUCH A MAN SLEEPS LITTLE AND IS QUICK TO WAKE. THE OPPOSITE TYPE SLEEPS TOO LONG.
HANZŌ-DONO, HOW DOES DANZŌ SLEEP?
LIGHTER THAN TREADING ON A THIN SHEET OF ICE.

AND AS YOU SUGGESTED, IF HE COULD, HE'D LIE ON A WARM PLACE WITH MOIST AIR WHERE IT'S EASY TO MAKE NOISE.
HE MIGHT DOZE OFF A LITTLE AROUND MIDNIGHT.
WHEN A SLEEPER IS BREATHING IN A HARMONIC, STEADY RHYTHM, HE IS FAST ASLEEP.
THAT'S RIGHT, HANZÔ-DONO.
HOWEVER, THE BREATHING OF A SLEEPER WHOSE LIFE IS BITTER AND HARD IS INHARMONIOUS AND IRREGULAR. IT'S WHEN HE TURNS OVER. THAT'S WHEN...

NEVER.
LISTEN, HANZŌ-DONO. IF SOMEONE APPROACHES YOU WHEN YOU ARE ASLEEP, AND HIS PRESENCE WAKES YOU, WOULD YOU TURN OVER THEN?
...HE IS SOUND ASLEEP. REMEMBER THAT!
THAT'S WHY IT'S YOUR GREATEST CHANCE WHEN A SLEEPING MAN ROLLS OVER.
YOU'D DESPERATELY TRY TO STEADY YOUR BREATH AND KEEP STILL AS IF YOU WERE ASLEEP, WOULDN'T YOU?
YOU SHOULD THINK ON WHAT IT MEANS TO SLEEP NEARLY HALF OF OUR LIVES.
HMMM.

IT'S THE DEPARTING SLEEP IN WHICH MY HEART AND SOUL WILL LEAVE ME AND NEVER RETURN.
I AM ABOUT TO ENTER A SLEEP FROM WHICH I WILL NOT WAKE AGAIN.
FATHER!
TSUKUMO WAS MY UNEXPECTED CHILD.

I THOUGHT I'D NEVER MARRY, BUT, ODDLY, I ENDED UP WITH A DAUGHTER. WELL, SHE'S MORE LIKE A GRANDDAUGHTER THAN A DAUGHTER.
SHE'S FORTUNATE SHE FOUND A LIFE WHERE SHE CAN SLEEP IN THE ARMS OF A MAN LIKE YOU, HANZO-*DONO*. I CAN PASS INTO THE DEPARTING SLEEP IN PEACE.
SO WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE, I USED TO HAVE HER CALL ME *JIJI*.
YES.
TSUKUMO.


UNSHEATHE AND SMELL THE BLADE ATTACHED TO MY LEG.
THE SPECTER'S BLOOD IS SMEARED ON IT.

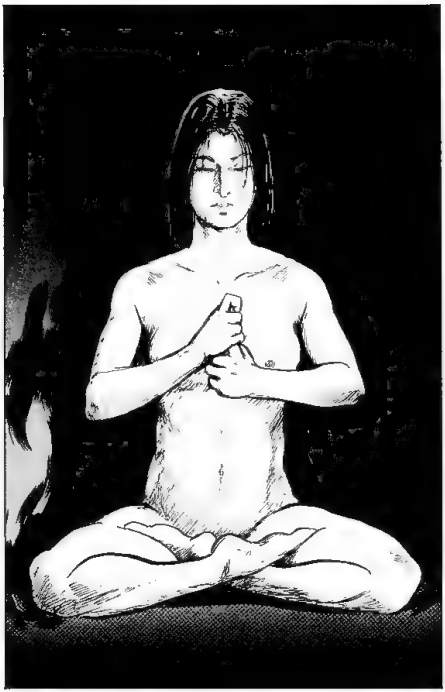
WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE SHE MASTERED A FORMIDABLE TECHNIQUE
HER SENSE OF SMELL IS SUPERIOR TO A DOG'S IT'S A KUNOICHI'S SKILL, WHICH NO OTHER CAN COPY
IS
CAN FIND WHERE HE
BY FOLLOWING THE SMELL OF DANZO'S BLOOD, MAYBE YOU

I
I ENTRUST IN
YOU
HANZÔ-DONO
TSU
KU
MO
WAHHH
FATHER!!
FA

I PROMISE...
...I WILL KILL KITE KATŌ.

Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

No. 7: Battle of One Hundred and Eight Days



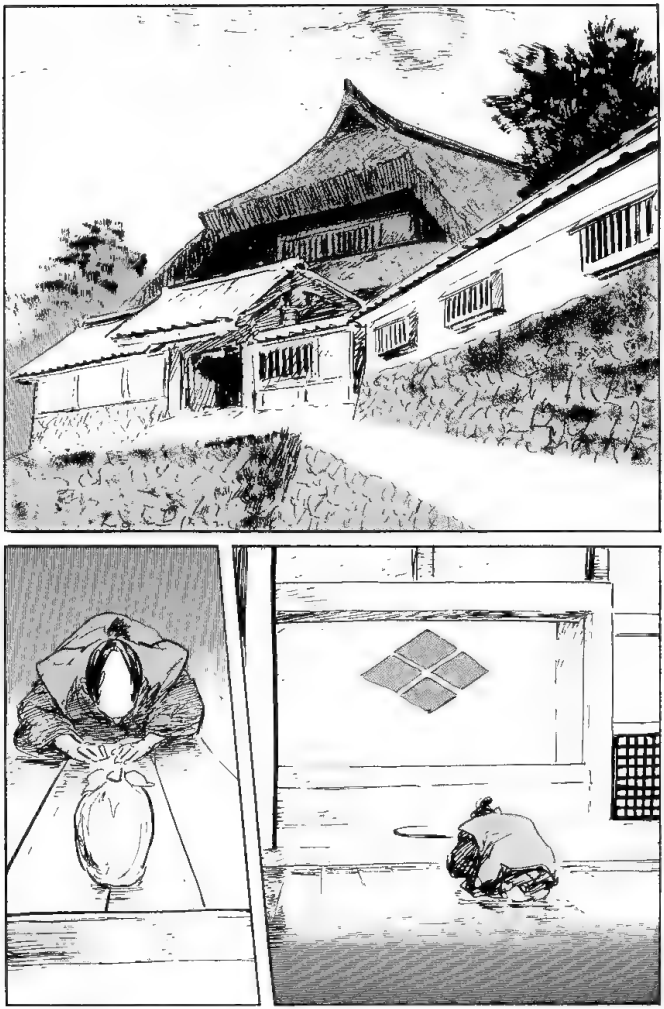
BACH!
BACH!
BACH!
RRRRRR

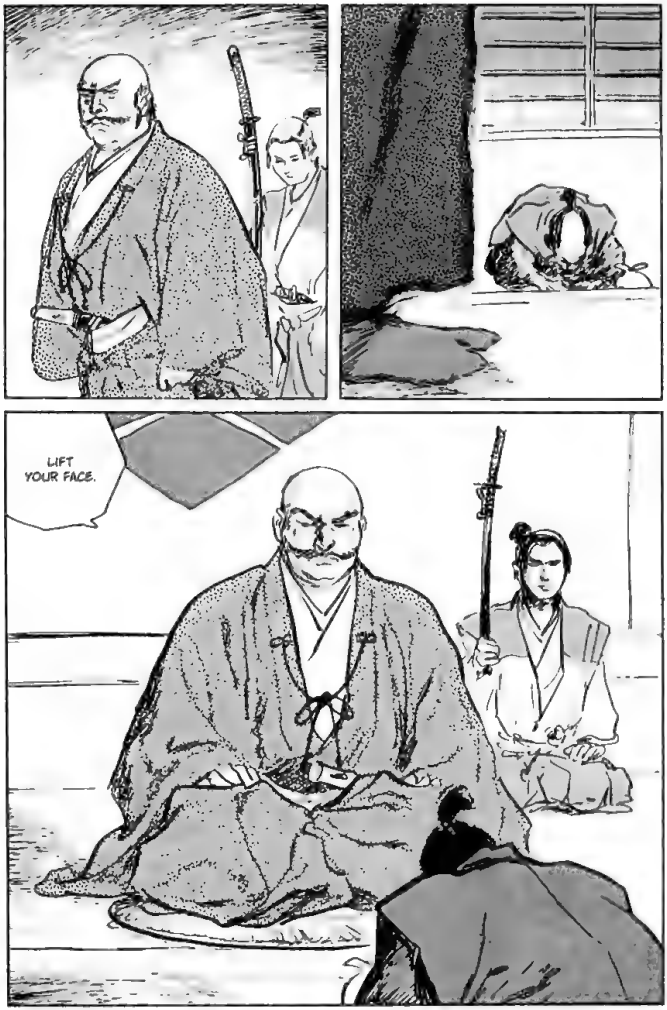
BACHI
BACHI
バチ
バチ
FOOOSH
BACHI
BACHI

バチ
BACHI
バチ
BACHI
ゴォ
fwoosh
ゴォ
fwoosh
バチ
BACHI
バチ
BACHI

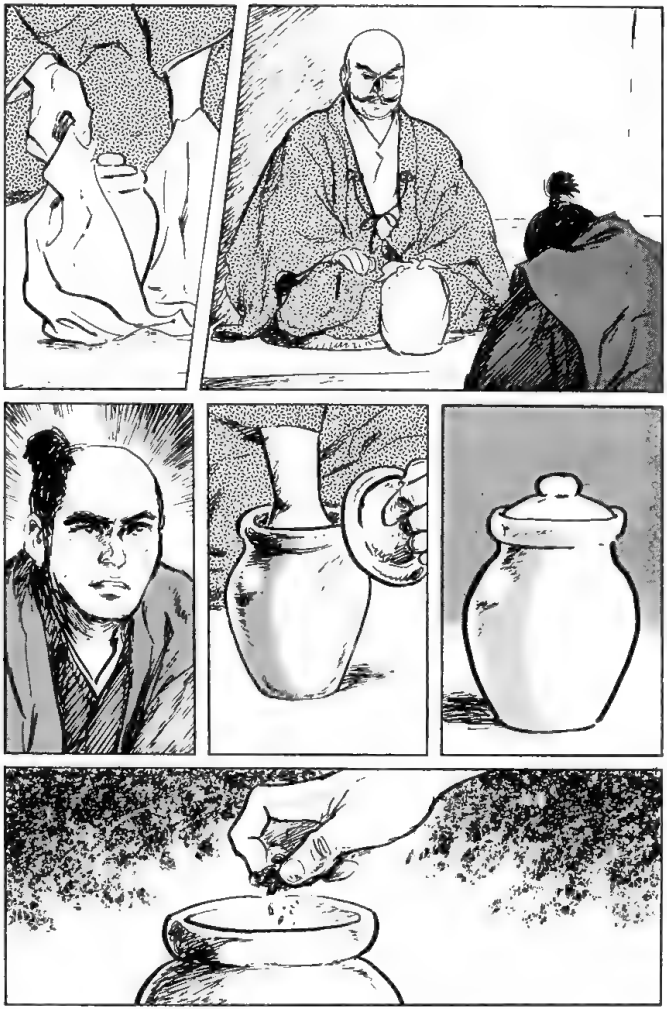
バチ
BACHI
バチ
BACHI
GROOOOSH

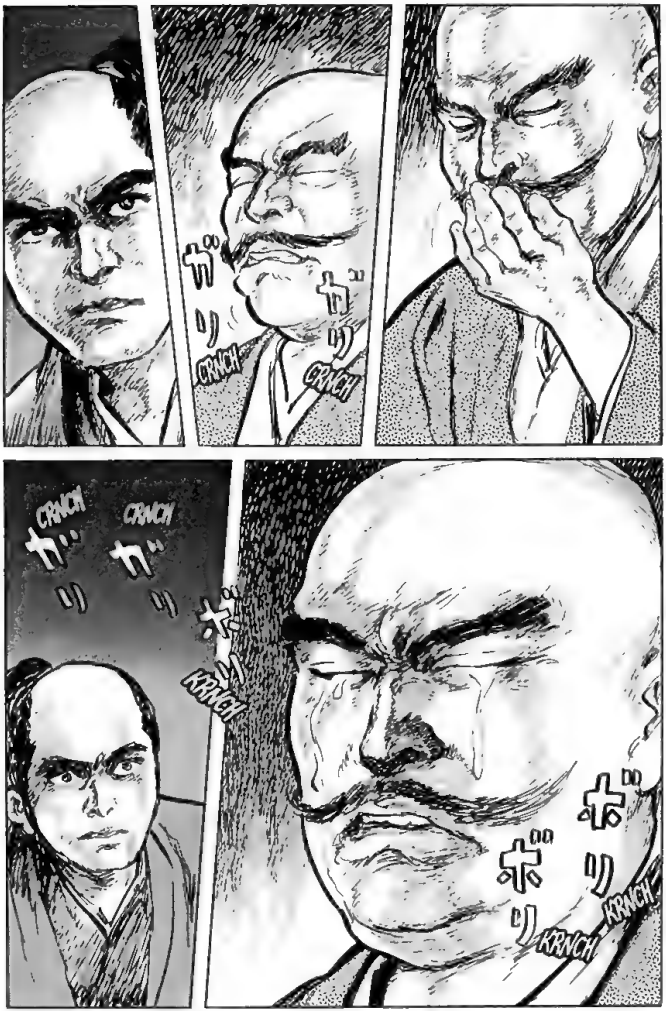
FWOOMP
ドオオー!




LIFT YOUR FACE.

I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, A VASSAL OF MATSUDAIRA IEYASU.
I HAVE COME UNDER ORDERS TO DELIVER THE BONES OF KANSUKE, MY FATHER-IN-LAW, WHO WAS CREMATED.
YES SIR.
HERE.




CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH

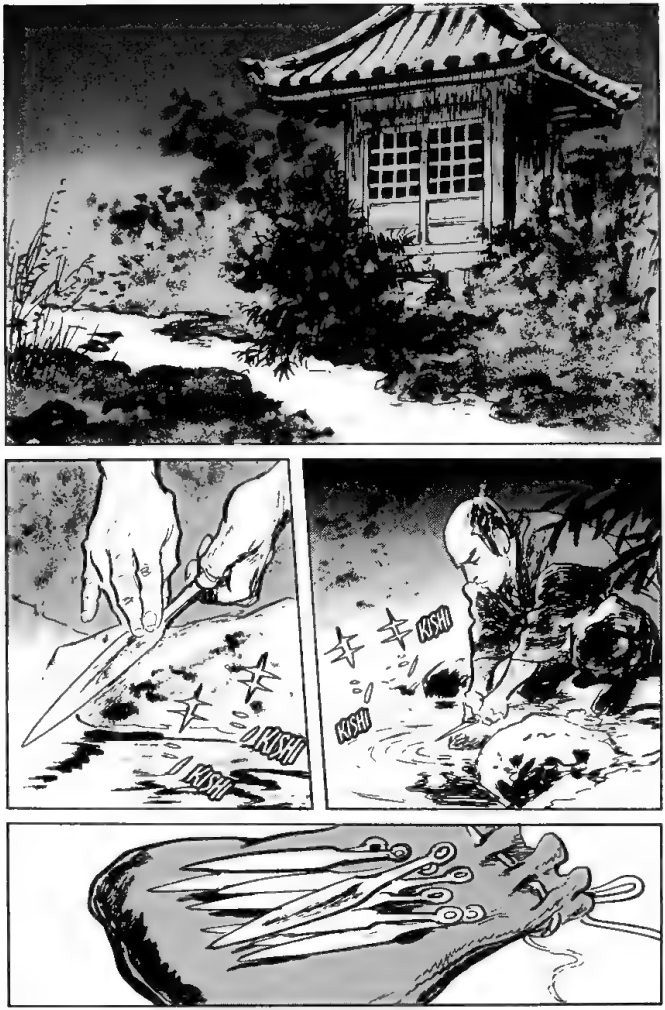
IF HE DIED, WOULD IEYASU EAT HIS BONES? HANZŌ WONDERED.
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
HE THOUGHT THE MASTER-SERVANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHINGEN AND KANSUKE WAS AS IF THEY SHARED THE SAME FLESH, AND EVEN IF EITHER OF THEM DIED, THEY STILL SHARED THE SAME FLESH.
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
HE HOPED HIS MASTER WOULD, THINKING THERE WAS NO GREATER HAPPINESS FOR A VASSAL.
CRUNCH
CRUNCH

HE FELT HOT TEARS WELL UP IN HIS EYES.
YES SIR.
HANZŌ.
ALSO, MITSUMONO GAVE ME A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF WHAT TOOK PLACE.
KANSUKE TOLD ME ABOUT YOU.

TO AVENGE MY FATHER-IN-LAW, AND... TO HAVE YOU, OYAKATASAMA, IN MY DEBT.
WHY DO YOU MAKE THE ATTEMPT?
THE ODDS ARE AGAINST ME.
CAN YOU TAKE OUT KATÔ DANZÔ?
...WHEN THE TIME COMES, I WILL RETURN WITH A REQUEST BENEFICIAL TO MY MASTER.
IF YOU CAN FEEL SOMEWHAT AT REST ONCE KITE KATÔ IS GONE...
EVEN THOUGH I AM MATSUDAIRA'S VASSAL, EVEN IF I END UP THROWING AWAY MY LIFE ON YOUR BEHALF, IT WILL STILL BE GOOD FOR MY CLAN.
FURTHERMORE, IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE MY FATHER-IN-LAW GAVE ME THE IDEA THAT I WAS ABLE TO RESCUE MY MASTER'S WIFE AND HIS CHILDREN FROM IMAGAWA. I HAVE YET TO RETURN THE FAVOR.

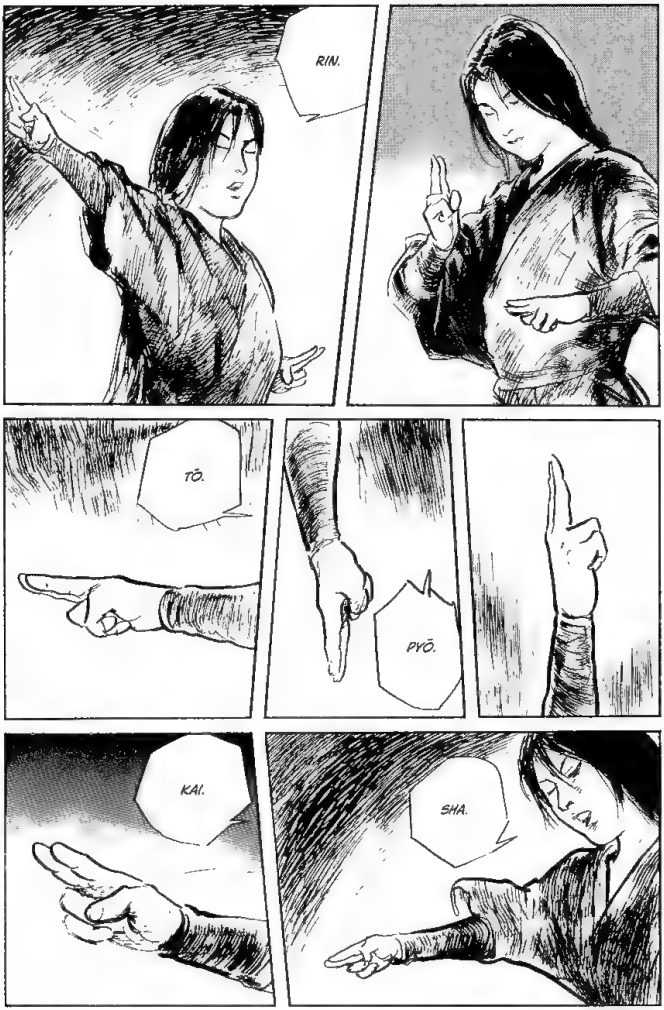
...THROUGH A SECRET TRAINING CALLED KUJI.
TO FIND THE WHEREABOUTS OF KITE KATO, SHE IS WORKING TO SHARPEN HER SENSE OF SMELL BY DENYING HERSELF OF FIVE DESIRES...
WHAT IS TSUKUMO DOING?
IT IS MODELED AFTER SHINGON'S NINE MANDALA OF THE DIAMOND REALM, VAJRADHATU, AND THE NINE HONORED ONES OF THE WOMB REALM, GARBHAKOSA.
IT IS THE SECRET METHOD USED BY JIANG TAIGONG WHEN HE HELPED KING WU DEFEAT KING DI XIN OF SHANG.
UNCLE WILL DO, EH?
KANSUKE WAS FATHER-IN-LAW TO YOU. WHAT AM I THEN?

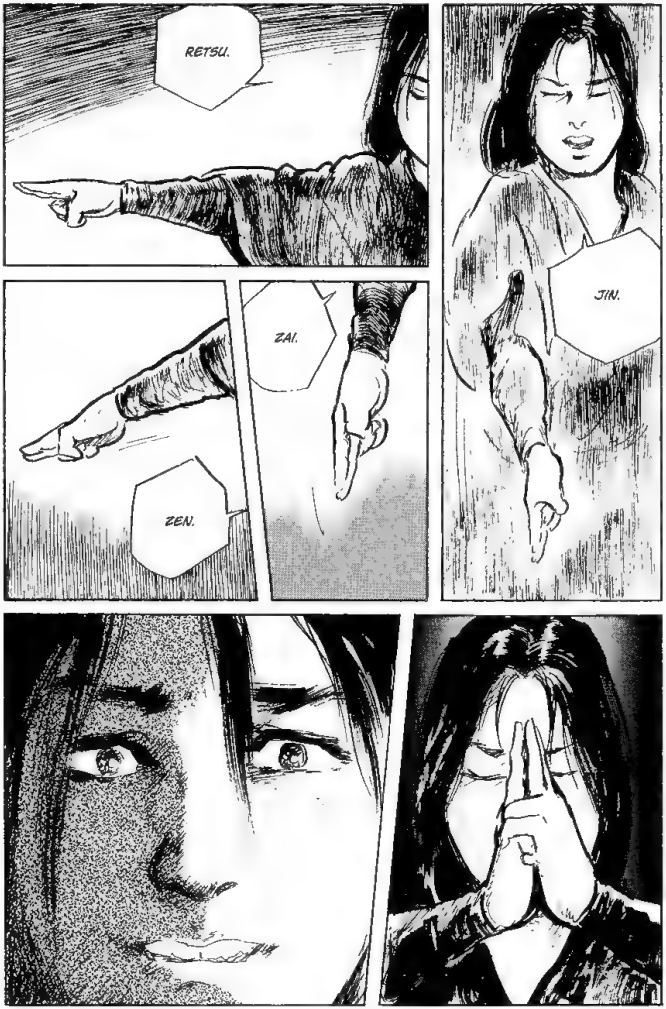
DO NOT TAKE CHANCES.
AS KANSUKE PUT IT EXQUISITELY, IF SHINGEN WAS THE MAN WHO RULED THE NATION... HANZŌ COULD NOT HELP THE THOUGHT.
THE MAN WAS LIKE A MOUNTAIN OR AN OCEAN. HANZŌ FELT HE WAS BEING SQUASHED OR DROWNED BY THE ENCOUNTER. HE SENSED THAT COMPARED TO HIS MASTER OR TO NOBUNAGA, THERE WAS INCOMMENSURATE GREATNESS IN THIS MAN.


KISHI
KISHI
KISHI
KISHI

PYÖ.
RIN!
SHA!
TŌ!

NOTE: REFER TO "CHANTS" IN GLOSSARY


RIN.
TŌ.
PYŌ.
KAI.
SHA.

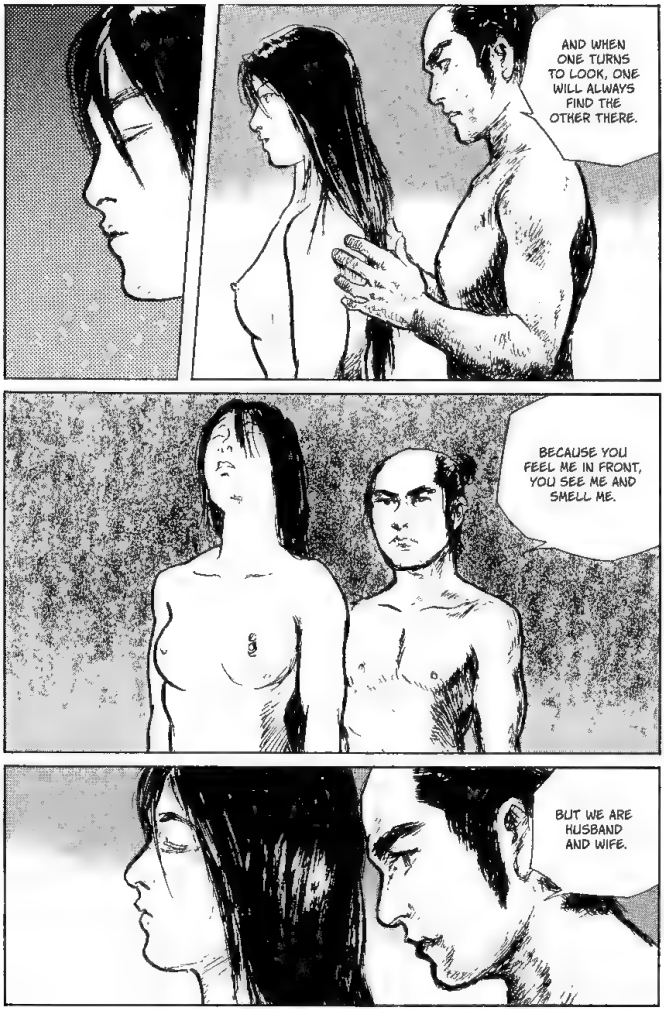

RETSU.
JIN.
ZAI.
ZEN.

SHA
KAI
RIN
PYÖ
TÖ
AND DISTRACTED
SHE'S AGITATED

I CAN'T DO IT!
I CAN'T! I CAN'T PERFORM THE SEALING RITE, NOR CAN I HANDLE THE NINE-LETTER CHANT.
NOT ANYMORE.
WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES, I SEE YOUR FACE.
GET NAKED, TSUKUMO. I'LL DO THE SAME.
WHEN I TRY TO SNIFF, I SMELL YOUR SCENT...

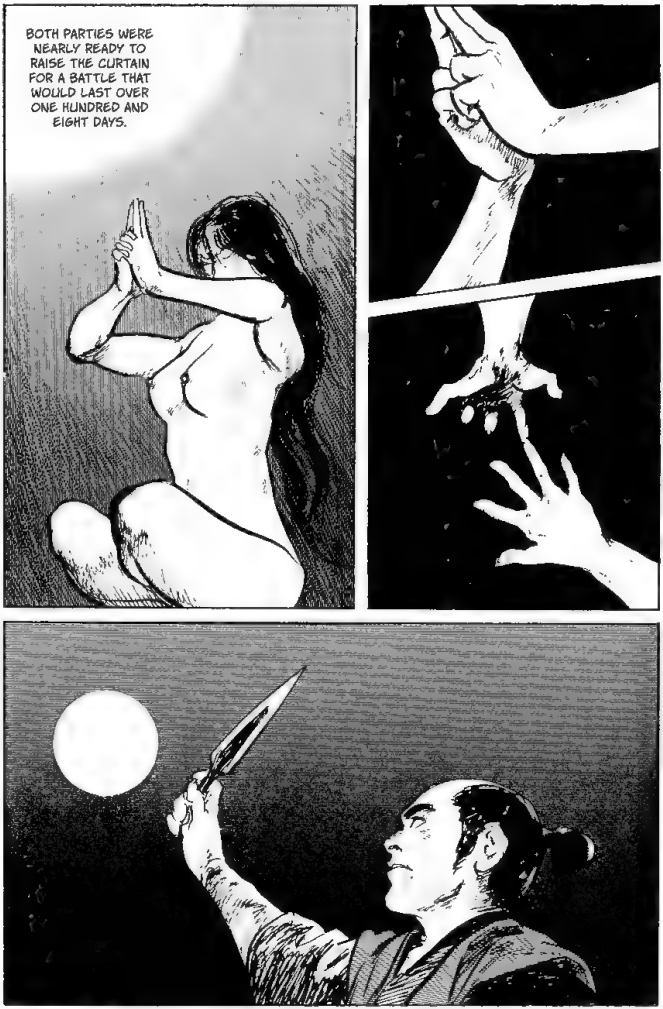
WE ARE HUSBAND AND WIFE. WE'RE TOGETHER UNTIL WE DIE AND TOGETHER STILL AFTER WE'RE DEAD

THAT'S HOW IT IS BETWEEN TRUE HUSBANDS AND WIVES. THEY ALWAYS SENSE THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHER BEHIND THEM. THERE'S NO NEED TO TURN TO LOOK BECAUSE THEY KNOW THE OTHER IS DEFENDING THE REAR.
IF YOU FEEL THE PRESENCE OF A MAN, FEEL HIM IN FRONT OF YOU. BUT IF YOU FEEL A HUSBAND, FEEL HIM BEHIND YOU.


AND WHEN ONE TURNS TO LOOK, ONE WILL ALWAYS FIND THE OTHER THERE.
BECAUSE YOU FEEL ME IN FRONT, YOU SEE ME AND SMELL ME.
BUT WE ARE HUSBAND AND WIFE.

YES.
..AND FIND KITE KATO!
NOW, PERFORM THE SEALING RITE. CHANT NINE LETTERS. STEADY YOUR BREATH..

FACING THE EAST, HE INHALED VITALITY THRICE, RUBBED BELOW HIS NOSE THIRTY-SIX TIMES..
...ENTERING THE POSITION OF SELF-DEFENSE.
...AND KNOCKED HIS TEETH THIRTY-SIX TIMES...


BOTH PARTIES WERE NEARLY READY TO RAISE THE CURTAIN FOR A BATTLE THAT WOULD LAST OVER ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS.

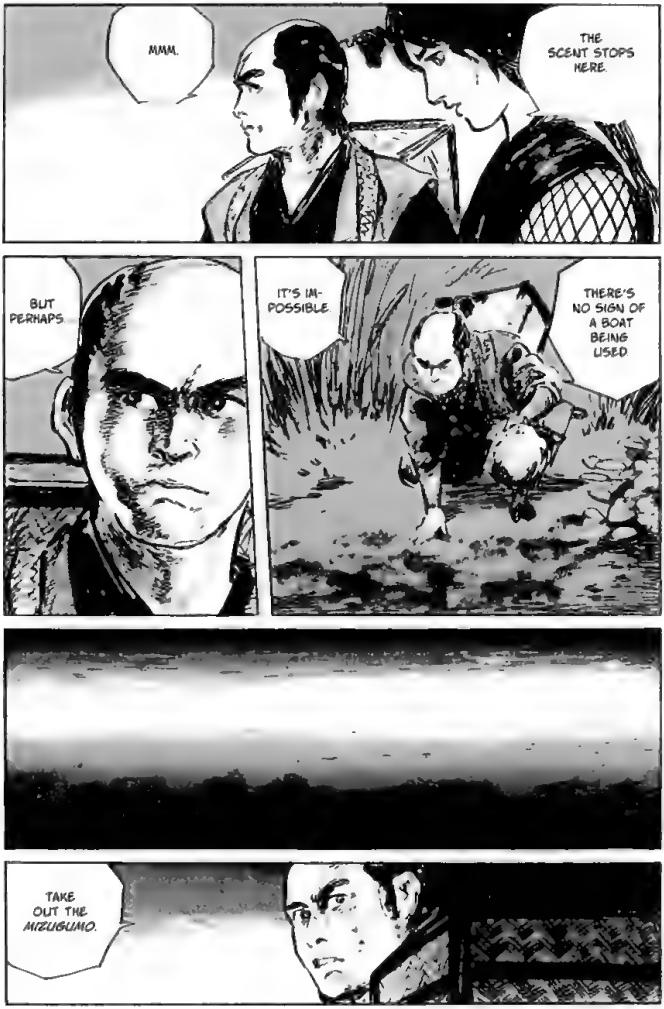
I SMELL IT.
I SMELL... THE SCENT OF BEASTLY BLOOD.
THE SMELL OF KATŌ DANZŌ.
AHH, I SMELL IT.
THE SMELL OF THE BLOOD THAT BELONGS TO THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER.

GOOD.
I SMELL IT.

SHŌ!
SAN!
IT COMES FROM THAT DIRECTION!

IT'S STAINED WITH BLOOD-- WITH THE SAME SMELL!

IF HE DID, ALL HIS BLOOD WOULD FLOW OUT BEFORE HE COULD REACH THE OPPOSITE BANK.
EVEN A SPECTER WOULDN'T ENTER THE WATER.
WHAT?!
I CAN'T SMELL IT!


MMM.
THE SCENT STOPS HERE.
BUT PERHAPS...
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
THERE'S NO SIGN OF A BOAT BEING USED.
TAKE OUT THE MIZUGUMO.

HUU
HUU
HUU

SHUU
I CAN'T SMELL IT...
IT'S GONE!

IT'S GONE...
I CAN'T...
NO SCENT MEANS HE LET THE RIVER DICTATE WHERE HE WENT....
WHAT A FORMIDABLE GHOST! DISCHARGING BLOOD FROM HIS WOUND, HE FLOATED DOWN THE RIVER.
GET THE KISHAKU!
WHAT DO WE DO?
NOW, WHERE DID HE DRAG HIMSELF OUT ONTO THE RIVER BANK?

IT NOW BELONGS TO TAKEDA...
UEHARA CASTLE WHERE SUWA YORISHIGE ONCE RESIDED IS IN THE NORTH.
THE RIVER FLOWS DOWN NORTHWARD, IT LOOKS LIKE.
FOR HIM, THE OLD TERRITORY OF SUWA IS LIKE HIS HOME.
THAT'S IT! HE KILLED YOUR FATHER AND IS AFTER SHINGEN-KŌ NOW TO AVENGE YORISHIGE.

OW... OWCH..
URNG.. IT THROBS WITH PAIN...

URK...
SUPPA... AND THERE'RE TWO OF THEM.
SUPPRESSED FOOTSTEPS...

DRIP
DRIP

FIRST, THE POWER OF SIGHT.
I HAVE ROKUJINTSU.

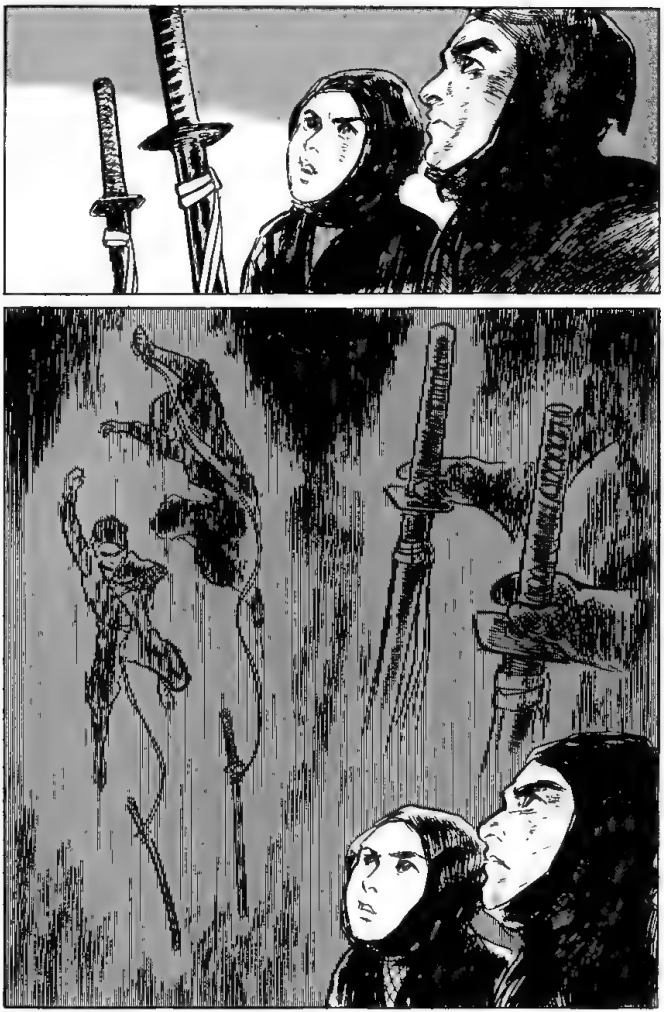
I CAN EVEN SEE IN THE DARK OF THE NIGHT.
I CAN SEE WHAT'S BURIED UNDER THE EARTH.
I CAN SEE THINGS FAR AWAY AS CLEAR AS IF THEY'RE ON THE PALM OF MY HAND.
ALL THINGS IN NATURE ARE REFLECTED IN MY MIND'S EYE...
...FOR IT IS ENDOWED WITH CLAIRVOYANT POWER.

SECOND, THE POWER OF HEARING!
I CAN HEAR ALL THINGS IN NATURE WITH MY MIND'S EAR...
I CAN HEAR THINGS WHISPERED FAR AWAY, AND I CAN CONVERSE WITH BEASTS AND BIRDS.

...FOR IT IS ENDOWED WITH CLEAR, PENETRATING HEARING.
BYU
BYU

FURTHERMORE, I CAN TRAVEL ANYWHERE LIKE THE WIND.
THIRD, THE POWER OF LEGS
I CAN JUMP HIGH, WALK ON WATER, AND TRAVEL THROUGH WATER.
WITHOUT MOVING AN INCH, I CAN SHRINK THE EARTH AND DRAW MY OPPONENTS CLOSER, AND THEN BURY THEM WITH MY MIND'S LEGS.
REGARDLESS OF WHO IT IS AND WHETHER I BEHOLD HIS FACE OR NOT, I CAN READ HIS MIND.
FOURTH, THE POWER OF KNOWING THOUGHTS.

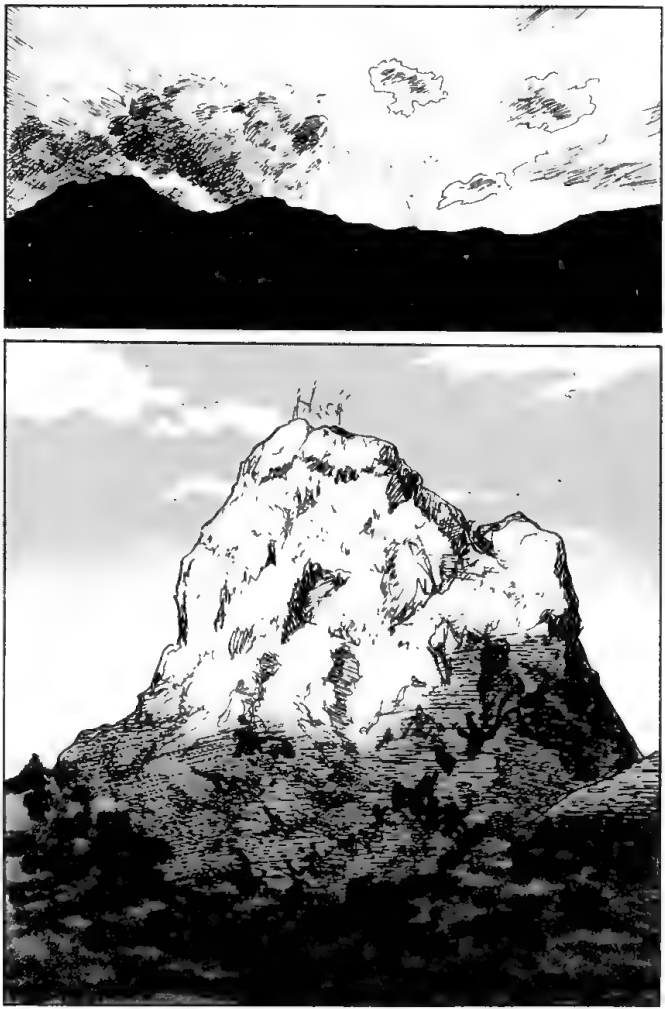
IT IS THE ART OF MIND-READING.
...AND WHAT HE IS ABOUT TO SAY.
I CAN KNOW HIS THOUGHTS...
FIFTH, THE POWER OF KNOWING LIVES!
...PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.
I HAVE THE ABILITY TO KNOW NOT ONLY MY OWN BUT ALSO ANYONE'S...

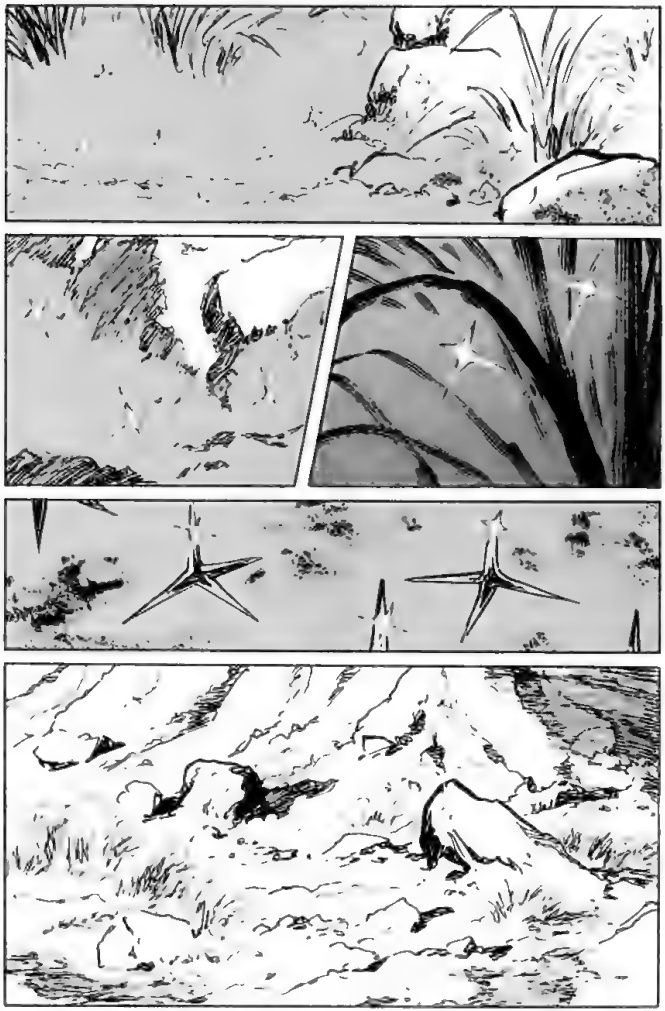


SIXTH, THE DIVINE POWER OF BUDDHA.
I HAVE NO YESTERDAY, NO TODAY, AND NO TOMORROW.
TO CHALLENGE SOMEONE LIKE ME WITH SUCH POWERS, YOU MUST REALIZE HOW LAUGHABLY RECKLESS YOU ARE.
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH. HA HA HA HA HA.
THERE'S NOTHING I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HELL, HEAVEN, OR THE WORLD OF THE LIVING.
THERE'S NO DIFFICULTY I CANNOT OVERCOME. IT IS AN ART OF DIVINE POWER WHICH WORKS EVEN AGAINST THE GODS.

THEY COULDN'T THINK THAT HASTE MAKES WASTE. THEY CHOSE TO WATCH FOR A WHILE.
THEY SHOULD'VE JUMPED OUT AND CHALLENGED HIM. IT WAS THEIR BEST OPPORTUNITY.
BESIDES, IT WAS ALREADY DAWN.
URK... OWW...

IF THEY ATTACKED, I COULDN'T HAVE SURVIVED...
I SOMEHOW MANAGED TO BLUFF THEM OFF LONG ENOUGH FOR DAYBREAK.
I CAN REST... UNTIL THE SUN SETS.
N... NOW...
WE'LL SCATTER MAKIBISHI AND SEAL HIM IN THAT CRAG.





HE WON'T MAKE ANY MOVES DURING THE DAY HE PROBABLY CAN'T
BUT HE MUST HAVE GUESSED THAT MAKIBISHI ARE STREWN EVERYWHERE.
HE DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT US, LIKE HOW MANY OR WHO

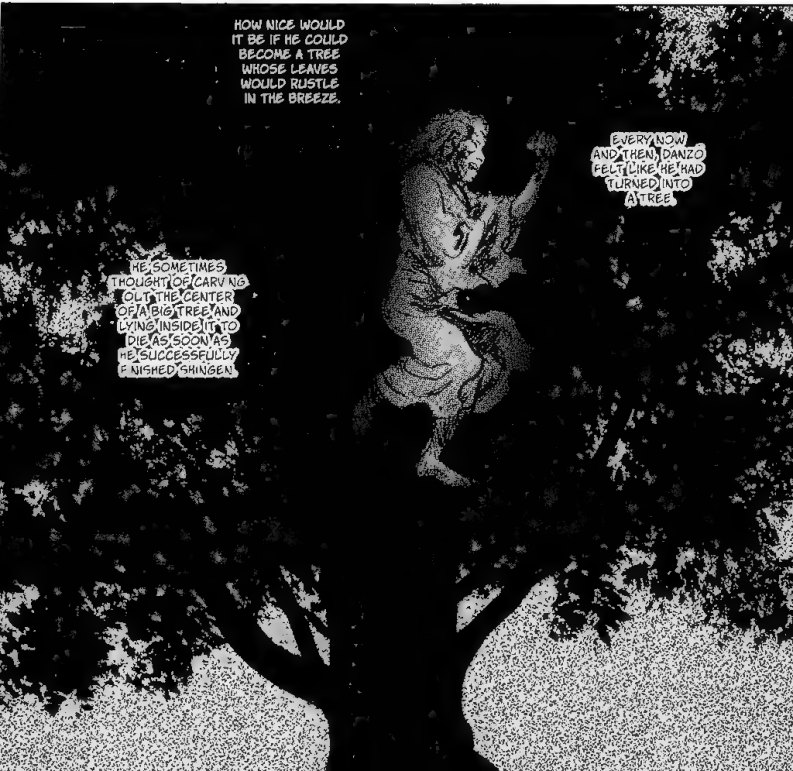
THAT MOMENT, THE SPECTER WAS FAST ASLEEP WOUNDED. HIS EXHAUSTION HAD ALREADY REACHED ITS LIMIT
HE WAS AN OLD MAN WHO'D SURVIVED THROUGH GREAT SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, RELYING ONLY ON HIS SKILL

THE ONLY THING HE GAINED THROUGH HIS ART WAS THE ALIAS-- THE KITE KATÔ, THE SPECTER-- WHICH MADE EVERYONE AVOID HIM.
HE HAD NO TITLE, NO WEALTH, NO RELATIVES, NO FAMILY, NO FRIENDS, AND NO HOME
HE WAS ALL ALONE.
AND ALTHOUGH HE HAD VAST TALENT AND HAD MASTERED VAST SKILLS, THE HEAVENS DID NOT GRANT THE OLD MAN EVEN THE TINIEST PIECE OF HAPPINESS

IT HAD BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE HE DROVE FROM HIS HEART WHAT IT MEANT TO CRY
THIS OLD MAN, WHO KNEW THE IMPERMANENT NATURE OF THE WORLD AND HAD TASTED THE BITTERNESS OF HUMAN SOCIETY MORE THAN HE EVER WANTED, DREAMT WITHOUT KNOWING HE WAS SHEDDING TEARS.
HE DID NOT KNOW HIS MOTHER
HE DID NOT KNOW HIS FATHER

URRNG...
AND HE HAD TO MASTER THESE ARTS THROUGH HARSH TRAINING, THE SEVERITY OF WHICH NO WORDS COULD DESCRIBE.
BY THE TIME HE REMEMBERED, A MOUNTAIN SHINOBI OWNED HIM.
AND HE DID NOT KNOW JOY.
HE DID NOT KNOW LOVE.

HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW OLD HE WAS ANYMORE.
DANZŌ STOPPED KEEPING TRACK OF HIS AGE.


HOW NICE WOULD IT BE IF HE COULD BECOME A TREE WHOSE LEAVES WOULD RUSTLE IN THE BREEZE.
EVERY NOW AND THEN, DANZŌ FELT LIKE HE HAD TURNED INTO A TREE.
HE SOMETIMES THOUGHT OF CARVING OUT THE CENTER OF A BIG TREE AND LYING INSIDE IT TO DIE AS SOON AS HE SUCCESSFULLY FINISHED SHINGEN.

IF ENOUGH OF US FORMED A KEKKAI SHIELD, IT WOULD BE THE END OF HIM...
WHY IS HE HIDING IN SUCH AN ISOLATED CRAG LIKE THAT?
HOW OLD IS THAT SPECTER-LIKE OLD MAN... I WONDER.

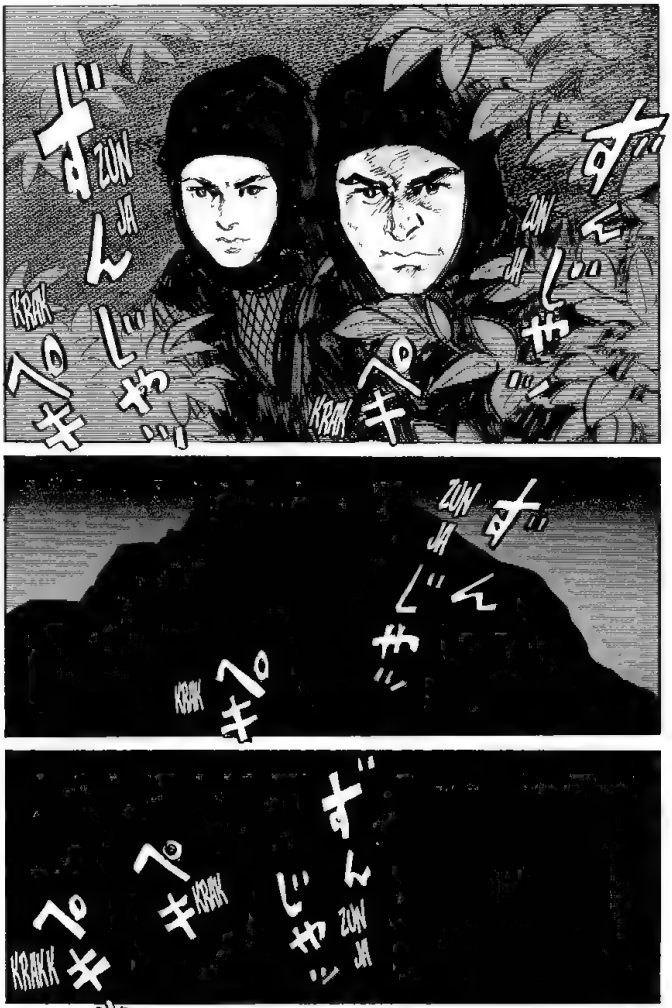
THAT WAS THE VERY REASON WHY DANZÔ COULD SLEEP KNOWING HIS ENEMY WAS NEAR
HE HAD ESCAPED COUNTLESS DANGERS... HE HAD EVADED NUMEROUS DEATHS...

BESIDES, HE WAS CONFIDENT HE COULD BREAK THROUGH ANY DIFFICULTIES OR ADVERSITIES
THE OLD MAN COULD LET GO OF ALL THOUGHT BY PRETENDING HE HAD BECOME A TREE.
THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE. THEY HAVE A SENSE OF COMPOSURE. THEY'RE IN NO RUSH.
DANZŌ THOUGHT THE BATTLE MIGHT LAST A LONG TIME. HIS ENEMIES DID NOT ATTACK SUDDENLY, NOR DID THEY MAKE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN. THEY CHOSE TO WAIT, IT SEEMED.

WHEN HE THOUGHT SO, AN IMAGE OF A MAN CAME TO DANZŌ'S MIND
A MAN WHO KNOWS THE ART OF WAITING IN BATTLE... HATTORI HANZŌ... THAT YOUNGSTER....
AND THAT MEANS THE OTHER ONE IS KANSUKE'S DAUGHTER-- A *KUNOICHI*. ARE THEY HUSBAND AND WIFE?
THAT'S PROBABLY IT.

ずん
ZUN
しゃ
SHA
ずん
ZUN
しゃ
SHA
KRAK
KRAK
ずん
ZUN
しゃ
SHA
KRAK
?!
IT'S AN ART OF JUTON.
WHAT IS THAT?
THE SOUND OF YOTSUTAKE.

BE CAREFUL. THE SOUND FROM YOTSUTAKE MOVES SNAKES.
ZON JARI
KRAK
ZON JARI
KRAK
ZON JARI
KRAK
ZON JARI


ずんじゃ
ZUN JA
ペキ
KRAK
ずんじゃ
ZUN JA
ペキ
KRAK
ずんじゃ
ZUN JA
ペキ
KRAK
ペキ
KRAK

ピキ
ピキ
ピキ
ピキ
ピキ
ピキ

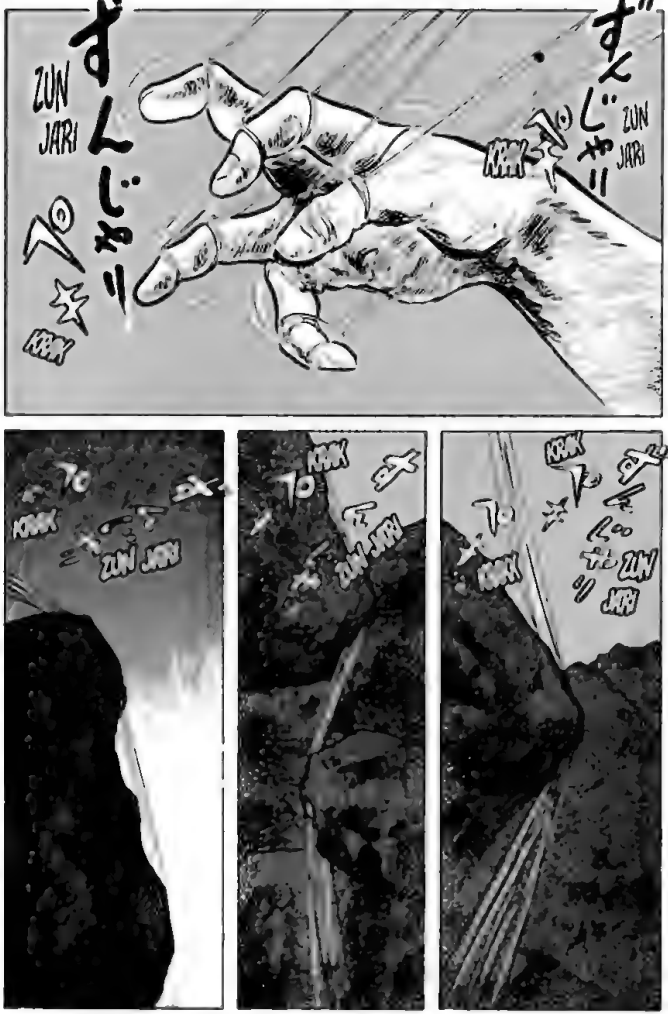
EVEN IF A KEKKAI BARRIER SURROUNDED HIM, HE COULD BREAK THROUGH WITH THE SNAKES HE CAN SUMMON WITH HIS YOTSUTAKE
HE HAS THIS ART AT THE READY THAT'S WHY HE DOESN'T MIND BEING UP THERE, WHERE ANYONE ELSE WOULD'VE BEEN HOPELESSLY BESIEGED
THIS IS THE REASON WHY HE SHUT HIMSELF UP ON A CRAG LIKE THAT!
THIS IS A WET LAND IF WE DIDN'T REALIZE IT WAS YOTSUTAKE, WE WOULD'VE FALLEN INTO HIS TRAP
BUT JIJI-SAMA ONCE TOLD ME SNAKES WOULDN'T HEAR ANY NOISE WE MIGHT MAKE EVEN IF WE WANTED TO SHOO THEM AWAY

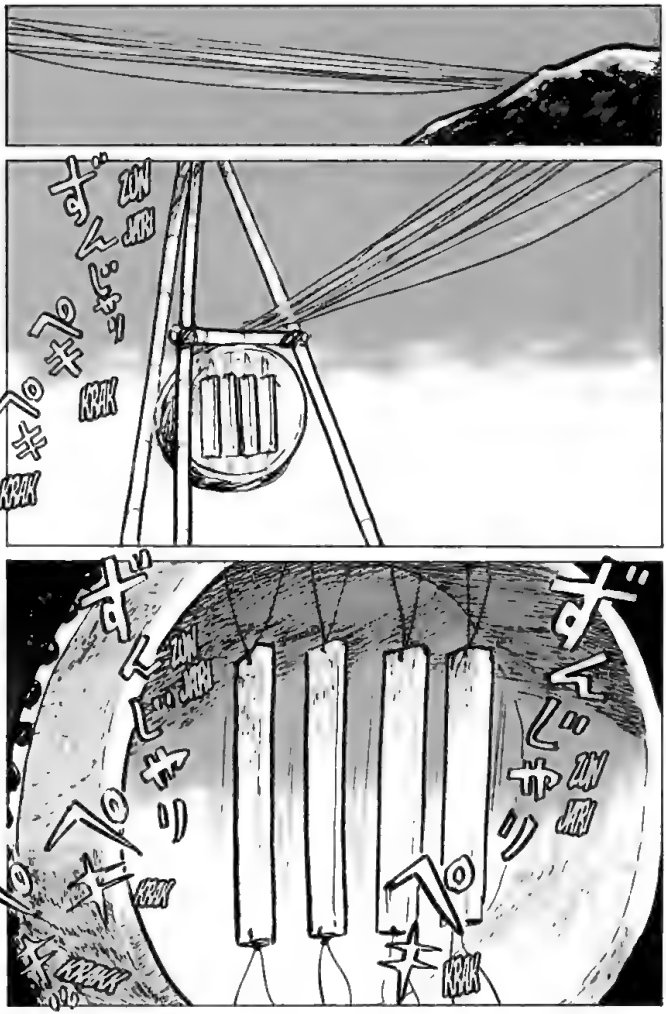
HE THOUGHT THEN THAT THE SNAKES MIGHT FEEL THE SAME VIBRATIONS.
MY FATHER TOLD ME ABOUT IT, TOO. WHEN HE WAS STILL A CHILD, HE SAW A *SHUGENJA* WHO CLAPPED *YOTSUTAKE* AND CONTROLLED A VENOMOUS SNAKE AT WILL.
HE TOLD ME HOW THE *SHUGENJA* SHUT HIS EYES, STUCK OUT HIS TONGUE AND CLAPPED HIS *YOTSUTAKE*, SHAKING THE AIR, AND HOW IT LOOKED AS IF HIS TONGUE WAS TASTING THE TREMORS IN THE ATMOSPHERE.

BYU

IT'S A VIPER!
AH!
SNAKES TURN MEEK IF YOU HOLD THEM BY THE NECK AND STROKE THEM A FEW TIMES.
SHWIP SHWIP

ずずずずず
ZUN JARI
KRAK
KRAK
ZUN JARI
KRAK
KRAK
ZUN JARI
ずずずずず
ZUN JARI
KRAK
KRAK
ZUN JARI
ずずずずず


ずんじゃり
ZUN JARI
ずんじゃり
ZUN JARI
ZUN JARI
ZUN JARI
ZUN JARI


ズンッ
ズンッ
ズンッ
ズンッ
ズンッ
ズンッ

THEY'RE OVER THERE.
CHOMP

ZUN JARI
KRAK
ZUN JARI
KRAK
ZUN JARI
KRAK
ZUN JARI
KRAK

UGAH.
UG...

BLINK, AND SHE'S DEAD
BE STILL!

I KNEW IT WAS YOU.
UGH...
HEH HEH HEH. YOU'LL HAVE TO DIE FOR A WOMAN. NO DEATH IS AS FUTILE AS THAT.
YOU'VE TAKEN KANSUKE'S DAUGHTER AS YOUR WIFE? HOW LITTLE LUCK YOU HAVE WHEN IT COMES TO WOMEN.
I HAVE COME TO END YOUR LIFE BECAUSE OF THE KARMA THAT JOINS US THROUGH MY WIFE, AND FOR THE SAKE OF MY CLAN.

GU...
UGG...
BUT NOW, LOOK AT THIS! YOU ARE IN THIS FIX BECAUSE OF THAT YOUTH.
HANZŌ! I REMEMBER WHAT YOU TOLD ME BEFORE. THAT THERE'S ONE TECHNIQUE YOU CAN USE TO DEFEAT ME, AND THAT IS THE TECHNIQUE OF YOUTH. HEH HEH HEH.
AND YET, YOU HAVE NO MEANS TO SAVE HER.
BECAUSE YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU CAN'T GIVE UP A WOMAN. BECAUSE YOU LOVE HER, YOU DON'T WANT HER DEAD.

IF YOU WERE AN OLD, SENSIBLE *SUPPA*, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN YOURSELF ROPED INTO SOMETHING LIKE THIS. HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
BECAUSE YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU TRY TO AVENGE YOUR WOMAN'S FATHER.
HOW FUTILE THAT IS. HEE HEE HEE.
NOT ONLY THAT, YOU ARE A VASSAL OF MATSUDAIRA. YOUR LIFE IS MEANT TO BE RISKED FOR YOUR MASTER. BUT LOOK AT YOU. YOU'RE ABOUT TO THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY FOR A WOMAN AND FOR TAKEDA.
WHAAT?!
YOU, TOO, MUST FEEL YOUR LIFE IS FUTILE.

YOU HAVE NO MASTER, NO VASSALS, NO HOME, NO STIPEND, NO FRIENDS, NO PARENTS, NO WIFE, AND NO CHILDREN.
IT'S BEYOND FUTILE. IT MUST SADDEN YOU.
FOR WHOSE SAKE DO YOU RUN AROUND IN THE WILD AND GO RAMPANT IN THE DARK, KNOWING IT MAKES YOU FEARED AND DESPISED BY ALL AS A MONSTER?
I FIND JOY AND SATISFACTION IN THE LIFE I LEAD, SO FULL OF PURPOSE DESPITE MY AGE.
THERE'S NOTHING FUTILE ABOUT IT!
I LIVE IN HONOR. I BURN WITH THE DESIRE TO RID OUR NATION OF THE DISLOYAL TAKEDA I BURN TO DELIVER VENGEANCE FOR MY FRIEND.

NO NEED TO HURRY. YOU GAIN NOTHING BY RUSHING TO DEATH.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, KILL MY WIFE THIS INSTANT AND FIGHT ME TO SETTLE THE MATTER.
HM!
THAT'S THE VERY REASON WHY I SAID YOU ARE AN EMPTY, SAD, LONELY MAN
YOU ARE ELATED. YOU'VE BECOME TALKATIVE. YOU CAN'T HELP IT, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE YOU ARE LONELY AND YOU HAVE NO ONE TO TALK TO.
YOU ARE ENJOYING THIS. THAT'S WHY YOU WENT AFTER MY WIFE INSTEAD OF ATTACKING ME.

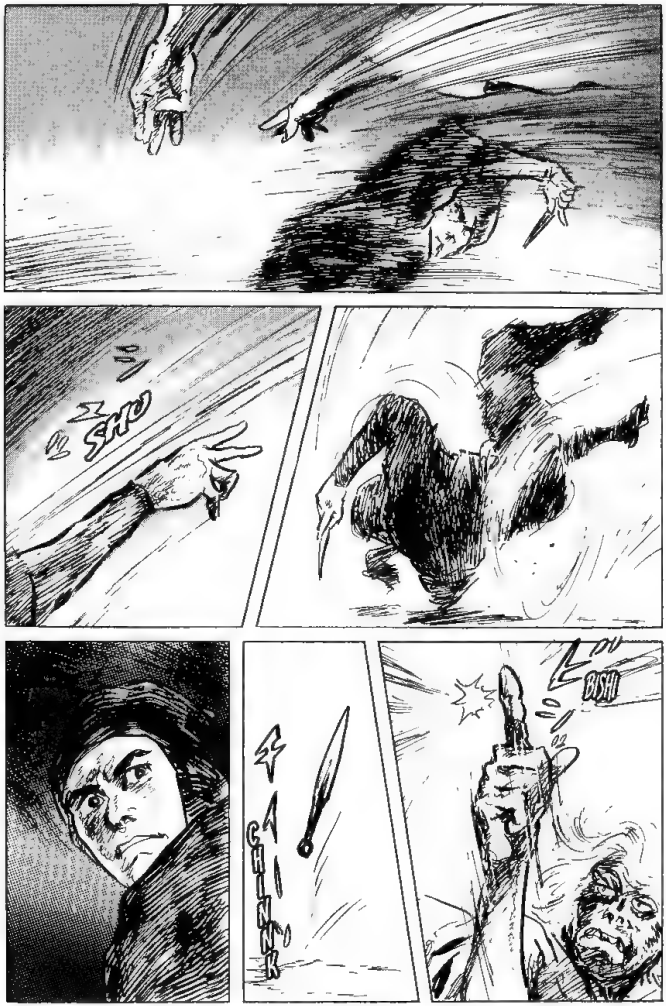
YOU INVITE ME TO ATTACK, SAYING BOTH YOUR HANDS ARE TIED. IT'S YOUR LONELINESS THAT MAKES YOU DO ALL THAT.
WHEN YOU COULD STRIKE MY WIFE DEAD, YOU SIMPLY GRABBED HER NECK TO TORMENT ME.
URG...
THIS, TOO, COMES FROM YOUR FEAR OF DYING SO EMPTY-HANDED AND ALONE.
YOU SAID YOU LIVE IN HONOR, BUT THAT'S A LIE!
YOU JUST WANT TO FLAUNT YOUR EXISTENCE, MAKING CERTAIN EVERYONE KNOWS IT'S YOU WHO KILLED TAKEDA'S OYAKATASAMA.

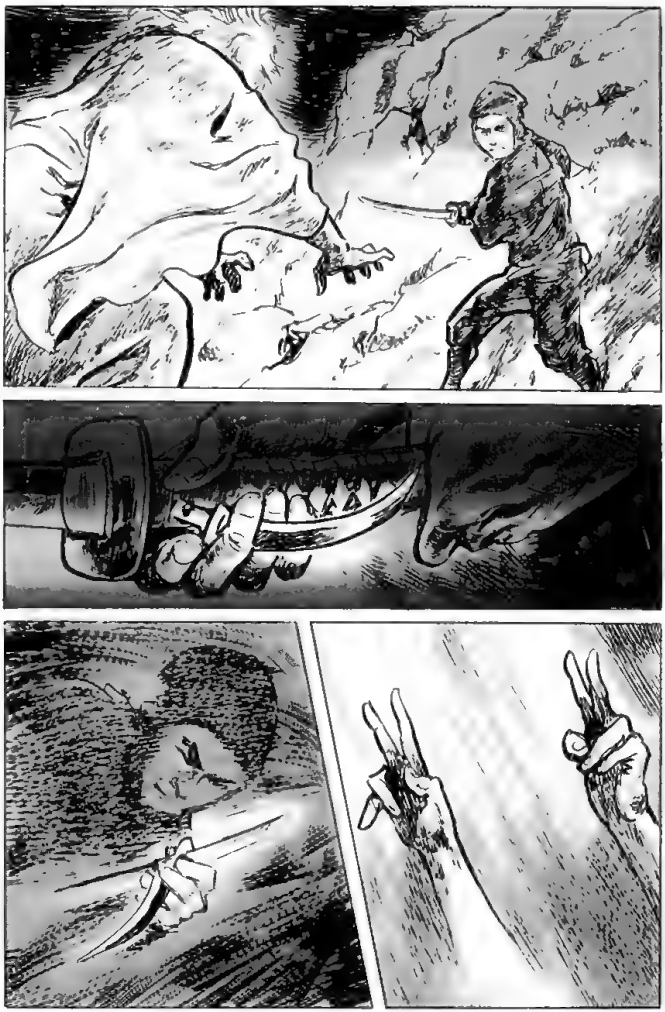
KNOWING THERE IS NO ONE SUPERIOR TO YOU IN ANY WAY, YOU ARE ANGRY AND SAD THAT YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN SO UNREWARDING.

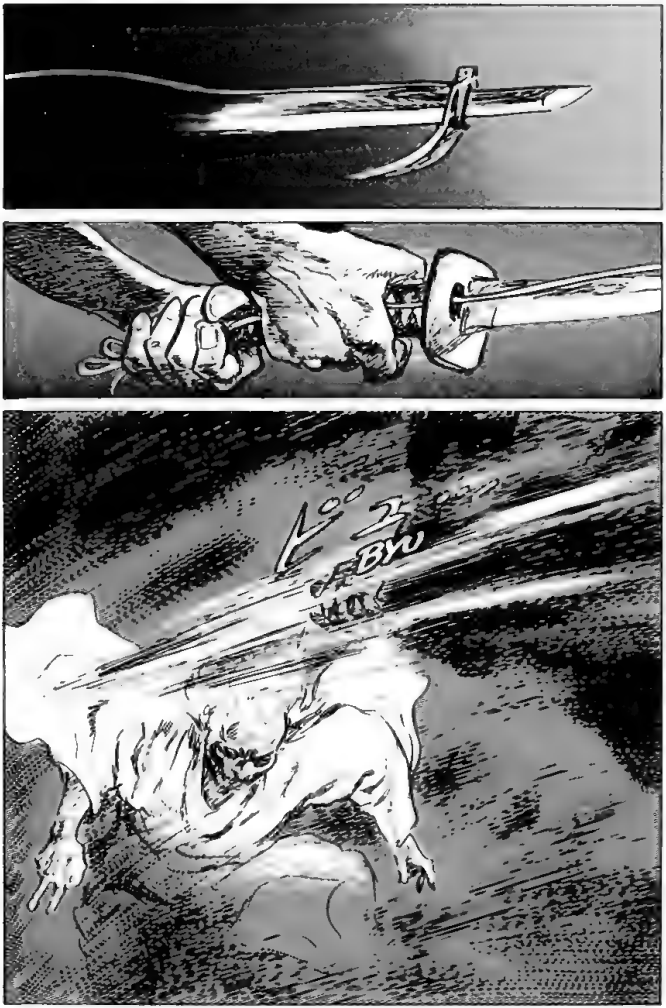
KEH-HEHHH.
HOW FUN!
THIS IS
AMUSING, INDEED.
HEE HEE HEE.

HANZŌ, WHY DON'T I TEACH YOU EVERY TECHNIQUE I HAVE, EH?
ZWIP
IT'S WHAT CREATED THE SOUNDS THAT PUT YOU IN THIS FIX. WHAT DO YOU THINK?
WHAT ABOUT THE ART OF YOTSUTAKE? YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CONTROL SNAKES AT WILL.

I WANT TO BE ABLE TO MOVE MEN, NOT SNAKES.
NUOOHHHH!!

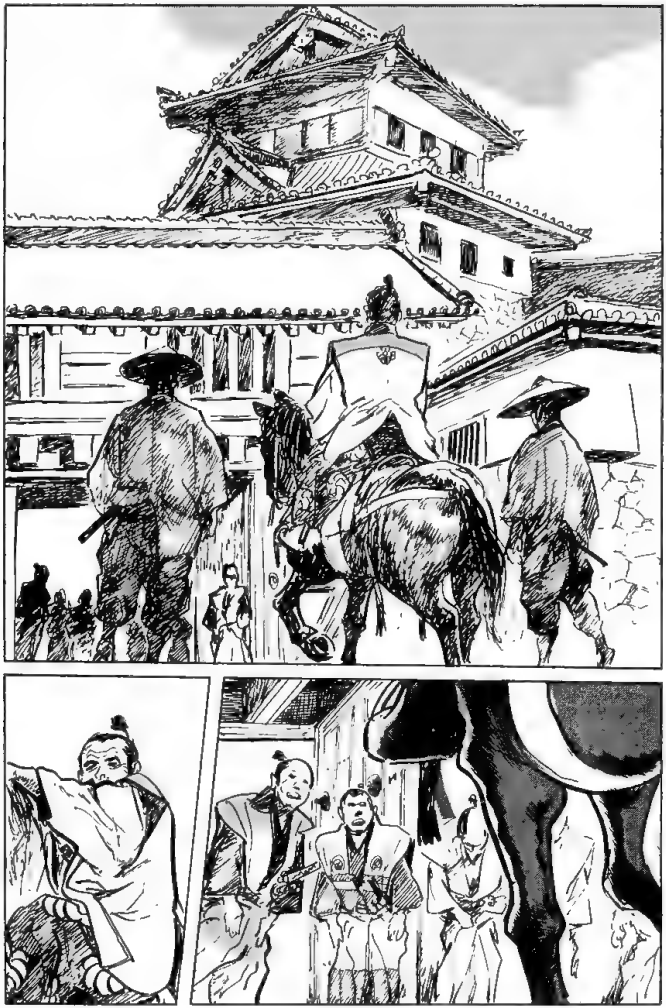

SHU
BISHI
CHIRIN




BYU

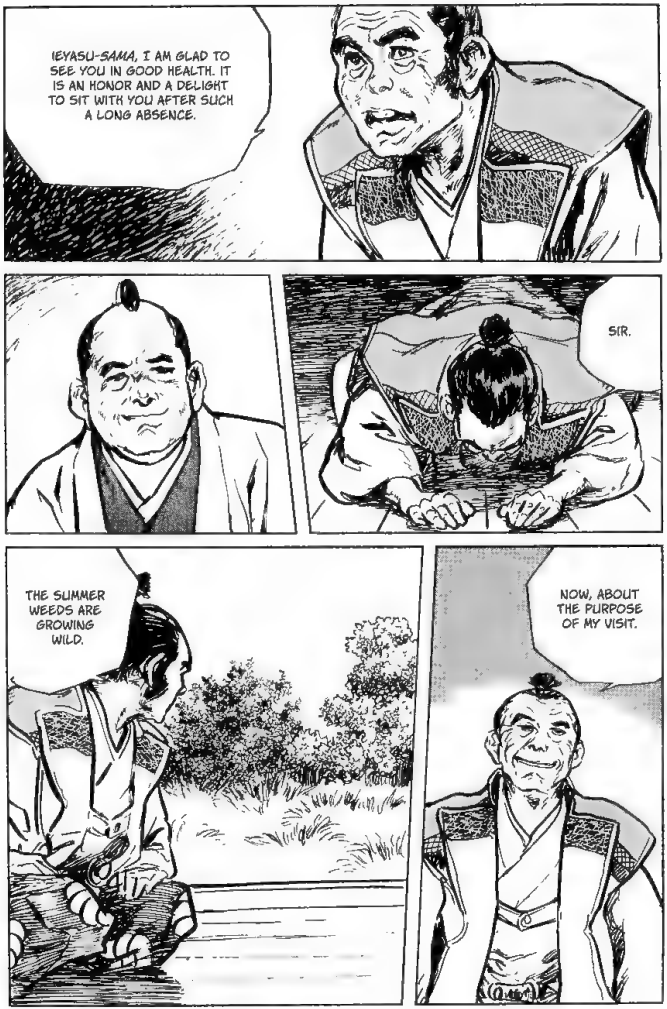
GUI
TUG
TUG
GYAAH
URRRGH!!

痛いぞ
IT HURTS!



I AM KINOSHITA TŌKICHIRŌ HIDEYOSHI, A VASSAL OF ODA NOBUNAGA I HAVE COME TODAY AS A PROXY FOR MY LORD
OH, THANKS FOR COMING OUT TO WELCOME ME.
.....

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TROUBLE TO JOURNEY SUCH DISTANCE. NOW, WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF YOUR VISIT?
I'VE RISEN A LITTLE IN THE WORLD. HEH HEH HEH.
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I SAW YOU LAST. I'M HIYOSHI, THE NEEDLE PEDDLER. HEE HEH HEH.


IEYASU-SAMA, I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU IN GOOD HEALTH. IT IS AN HONOR AND A DELIGHT TO SIT WITH YOU AFTER SUCH A LONG ABSENCE.
SIR.
THE SUMMER WEEDS ARE GROWING WILD.
NOW, ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF MY VISIT.

DO YOU LIKE THEM? OR DO YOU LOATHE THEM?
IEYASU-SAMA, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF SUMMER WEEDS?
THEY SAY YOU'RE UNDER THE SHADOW OF WEEDS WHEN YOU DIE.
I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING PARTICULAR ABOUT THEM.

IT'S BECAUSE IT FEELS AS IF THEY THRIVE ON THE BLOOD OF DEAD.
THERE'S NOTHING AS OFFENSIVE AS THE SUMMER WEEDS THAT GROW WILD ON A BATTLEFIELD AFTER A FIGHT.
WHEN I IMAGINE DYING IN BATTLE, SEEING ONLY THE SUMMER WEEDS IN MY EYES AS I LIE ON A FIELD...
...IT MAKES ME SHIVER. I HOPE THAT NEVER HAPPENS.
I HAVE COME TO SEE TO IT THAT THE SUMMER WEEDS WILL NEVER FEED ON YOUR BLOOD.
SO, IEYASU-SAMA...

WE MAY SHED OUR BLOOD WHEN WE FIGHT SOMEONE ELSE, BUT THERE WILL BE NO CHANCE OF IT HAPPENING BETWEEN US!
TO ACHIEVE THAT END, THERE'S NO BETTER WAY THAN UNITING OUR TWO BLOOD LINES AND KEEPING VIGILANT TOGETHER. BESIDES, ONCE THE CLANS OF ODA AND MATSUDAIRA BECOME ONE, WE WON'T BE SPILLING EACH OTHER'S BLOOD.
AND, OF COURSE, NOT ON ODA'S BLOOD EITHER.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

YES. SHE IS CALLED TOKU-HIME-SAMA.
TAKECHIYO AND THE FIRST DAUGHTER OF NOBUNAGA-DONO...
WOULDN'T THEY MAKE A GOOD MATCH?
TOKU-HIME-SAMA IS ALSO FOUR YEARS OLD.
BUT TAKECHIYO IS ONLY FOUR YEARS OLD.
I ENTREAT YOU.
PLEASE GIVE IT GOOD THOUGHT.
THEY MAY BE ENGAGED NOW, ALTHOUGH THE WEDDING CEREMONY WON'T COME UNTIL MUCH LATER.

...FOR DOING THIS.
EXCUSE ME...
HMM...

UWA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
I WOULD LIKE TO CUT DOWN THE SUMMER WEEDS.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.

HA HA HA HA HA.
IF I HAD IT DONE YESTERDAY, YOUR STORY MIGHT'VE CHOKED YOU AT THE THROAT
I WAS THINKING OF HAVING THEM CLEANED OUT TOMORROW.
YOU'RE LUCKY THE WEEDS ARE GROWING WILD IN THE GARDEN.
HA HA HA HA HA
FOUR HUNDRED SEVENTY-TWO ROW HOUSES FOR ASHIGARU AND CHŪGEN. THIRTY-SIX SMALLER CABINS FOR ASHIGARU.
YOUR CASTLE WALLS HAVE FOUR FIRING HOLES FOR ARCHERS SIX FOR MUSKETS AND SPEARS IN THIS CASTLE TOWN. THERE ARE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-TWO HOMES AND TWELVE ROW HOUSES FOR SAMURAI.

TWENTY-SIX WELLS, AND SIX THOUSAND SACKS OF RICE IN RESERVE.
THERE'S NOTHING WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR CASTLE. AFTER ALL, THIS IS WHAT ODA'S FIRST PRINCESS WILL BE MARRYING INTO. SURELY THE LENGTH OF THE WEEDS SHOULD BE NO EXCEPTION...
AS FOR THE OLD PINE TREE ON THE *HACHIMAN* BAILEY, YOU HAD ITS BRANCHES TRIMMED YESTERDAY, DIDN'T YOU?
NOW, EXCUSE ME.

WSK
WSK
WSK
WSK
I'D LIKE TO USE THIS OCCASION TO PICK YOUR BRAIN. IT'S ABOUT SOMETHING I WANT TO DISCUSS ONLY WITH YOU, WHO KNOWS EVERYTHING.
WSK
WSK

BECAUSE I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM AROUND.
H... HOW DO YOU KNOW?
THEN IT MUST BE ABOUT HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI-DONO.
WILL YOU JUDGE WHAT IT MEANS? I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT IT MYSELF.
I'VE BEEN THINKING HOW STRANGE IT IS, IEYASU-SAMA, THAT YOU DON'T SEEM TO HAVE YOUR RIGHT-HAND MAN WITH YOU.
HM.
PLEASE GO ON.

EVER SINCE, HANZŌ WON'T RETURN.
AFTER HE SUCCESSFULLY RESCUED MY WIFE, TAKECHIYO, AND KAME-*HIME*, WHO WERE TAKEN HOSTAGE AT SURUGA, HE LEFT FOR IGA TO RECUPERATE FROM INJURIES HE'D SUSTAINED.
WSK
DESPITE HIS POSITION AS A VASSAL, HE'S ACTED ON HIS OWN, DECIDING HIS COURSE OF ACTION WITHOUT TALKING TO HIS MASTER OR RECEIVING PERMISSION.
WSK
WSK

BUT NOW, I CAN'T HELP FEELING THAT THERE MUST BE SOME DEEPER MEANING.
FOR A WHILE, I WAS INFURIATED.
SNIP
WILL YOU JUDGE THIS?
IT'S HANZŌ AFTER ALL... THERE MUST BE A SIGNIFICANT REASON...
IS IT TRUE HE WAS WOUNDED?

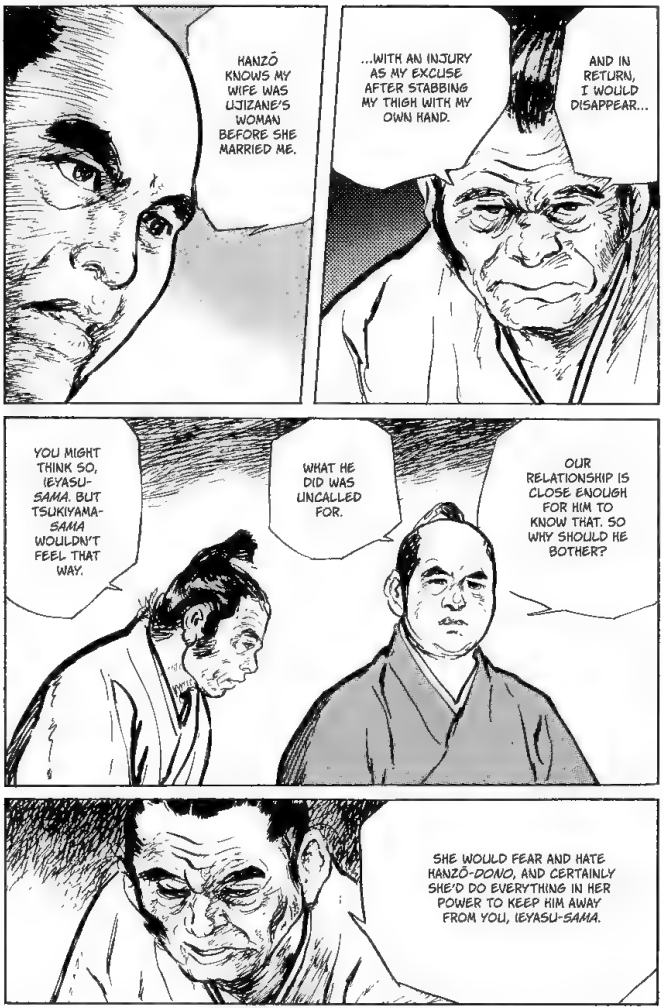
OTHERS TOO MUST'VE TOLD YOU ABOUT HIS WOUND.
MY WIFE SAID HE WAS HURT ON HIS THIGH.
THERE'S A SAYING AMONG THE FORTUNE TELLERS THAT THEY SHOULD NEVER FORETELL DEATH, BURGLARY, OR ADULTERY.
NO. SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW ANOTHER THING IS, THE TWO OF THEM APPARENTLY SENT EVERYONE ELSE AWAY SO THEY COULD TALK ALONE.

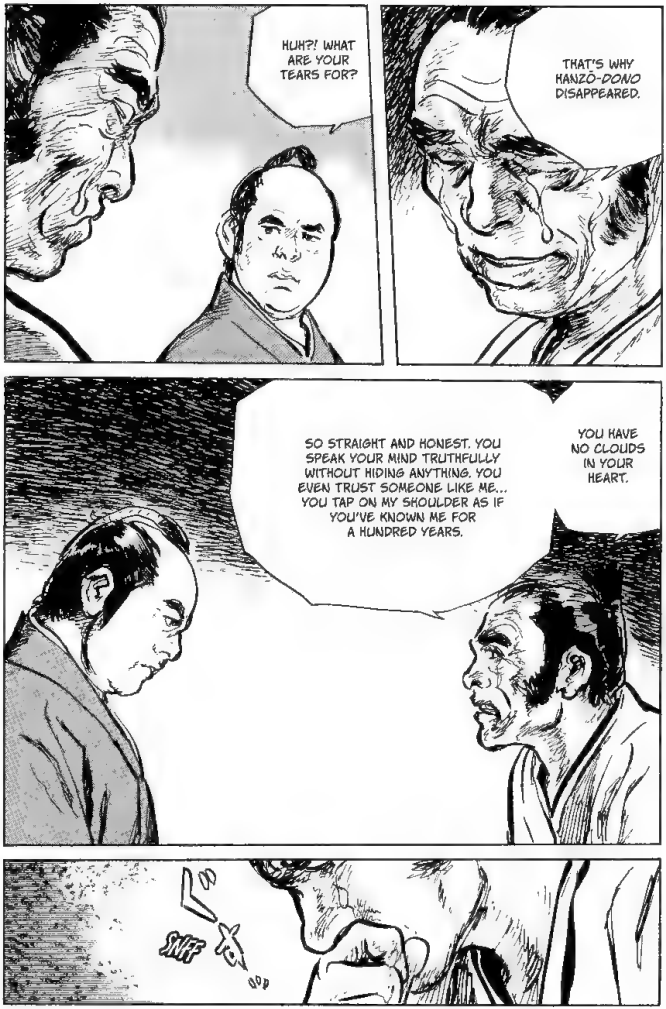
HOWEVER, I WON'T USE THAT NICKNAME THIS TIME... AND INSTEAD, I'LL BECOME A MONKEY ON YOUR BEHALF, IEYASU-SAMA.
MY LORD CALLS ME BALDY RAT.
I SHALL BE A MONEY WHO SEES NO EVIL, HEARS NO EVIL, AND SPEAKS NO EVIL.

AND I WOULD LIKE YOU TO PARDON ME NO MATTER WHAT I SAY.
JUST LIKE THE FORTUNE TELLER, HE MIGHT HAVE SEEN WHAT HE SHOULDN'T HAVE.
THE FIRST QUESTION THAT COMES TO MIND IS, WHAT DID HANZŌ-DONO SEE WHEN HE SNUCK INTO IMAGAWA'S PALACE IN SUNPU

MMM

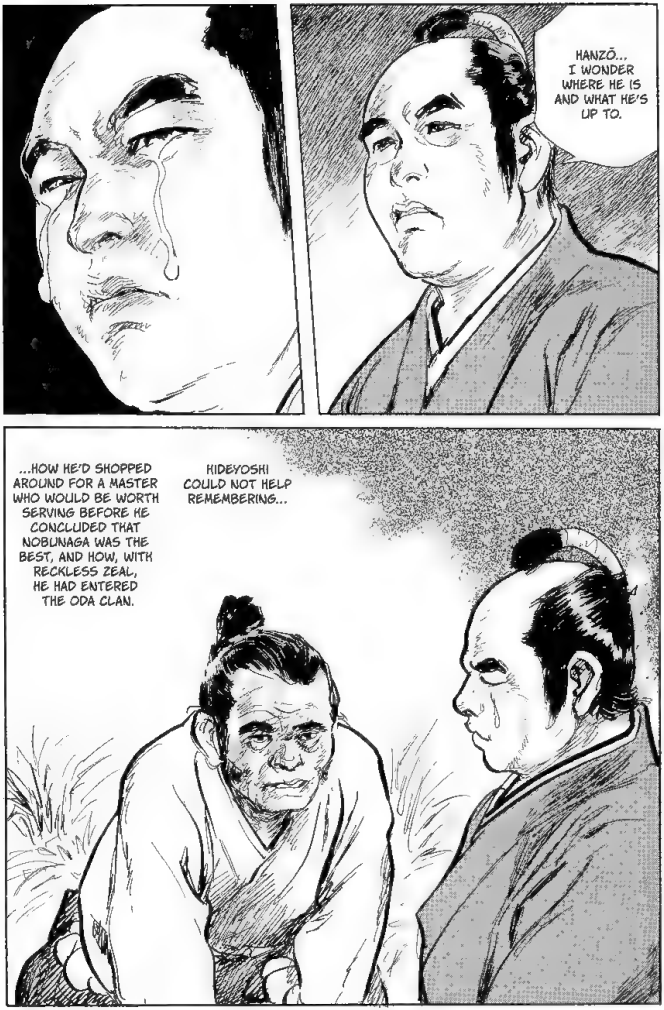
AND IN THAT CASE, IF I WERE IN HANZO-DONO'S POSITION, I WOULD ENTREAT CHIKUZAN-SAMA...
...NOT TO SLEEP WITH MY MASTER FOR TEN MONTHS.


KANZÔ KNOWS MY WIFE WAS UJIZANE'S WOMAN BEFORE SHE MARRIED ME.
...WITH AN INJURY AS MY EXCUSE AFTER STABBING MY THIGH WITH MY OWN HAND.
AND IN RETURN, I WOULD DISAPPEAR...
YOU MIGHT THINK SO, IEYASU-*SAMA*. BUT TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* WOULDN'T FEEL THAT WAY.
WHAT HE DID WAS UNCALLED FOR.
OUR RELATIONSHIP IS CLOSE ENOUGH FOR HIM TO KNOW THAT. SO WHY SHOULD HE BOTHER?
SHE WOULD FEAR AND HATE HANZÔ-*DONO*, AND CERTAINLY SHE'D DO EVERYTHING IN HER POWER TO KEEP HIM AWAY FROM YOU, IEYASU-*SAMA*.

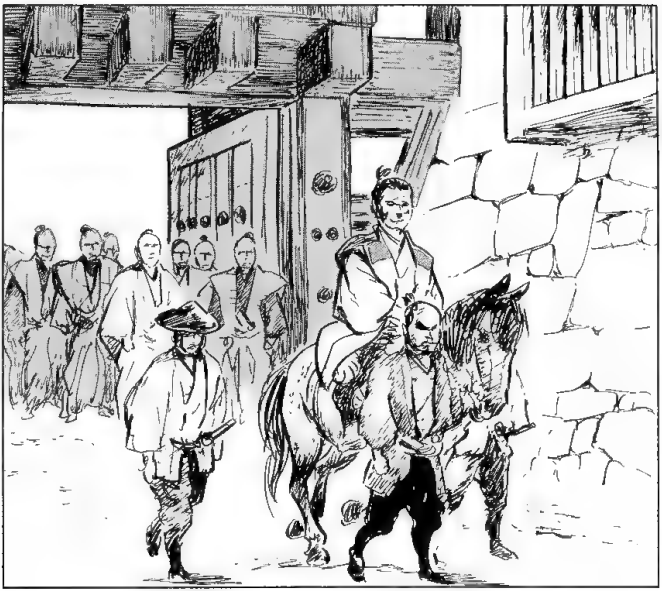

HUH?! WHAT ARE YOUR TEARS FOR?
THAT'S WHY HANZŌ-DONO DISAPPEARED.
YOU HAVE NO CLOUDS IN YOUR HEART.
SO STRAIGHT AND HONEST. YOU SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY WITHOUT HIDING ANYTHING. YOU EVEN TRUST SOMEONE LIKE ME... YOU TAP ON MY SHOULDER AS IF YOU'VE KNOWN ME FOR A HUNDRED YEARS.
SNIFF

EVEN IF YOU TRUST MY MONKEY FACE, I'M NOT YOUR VASSAL, AFTER ALL.
NO WARLORD WOULD SAY FORTHRIGHT THAT TSUKIYAMA-SAMA WAS UJIZANE-DONO'S LOVER.
SOMEHOW, IT FEELS LIKE WHATEVER WAS STUCK IN MY CHEST HAS FALLEN OFF.
HOW BROAD-MINDED YOU ARE. I CAN'T HELP MY TEARS FOR THAT.

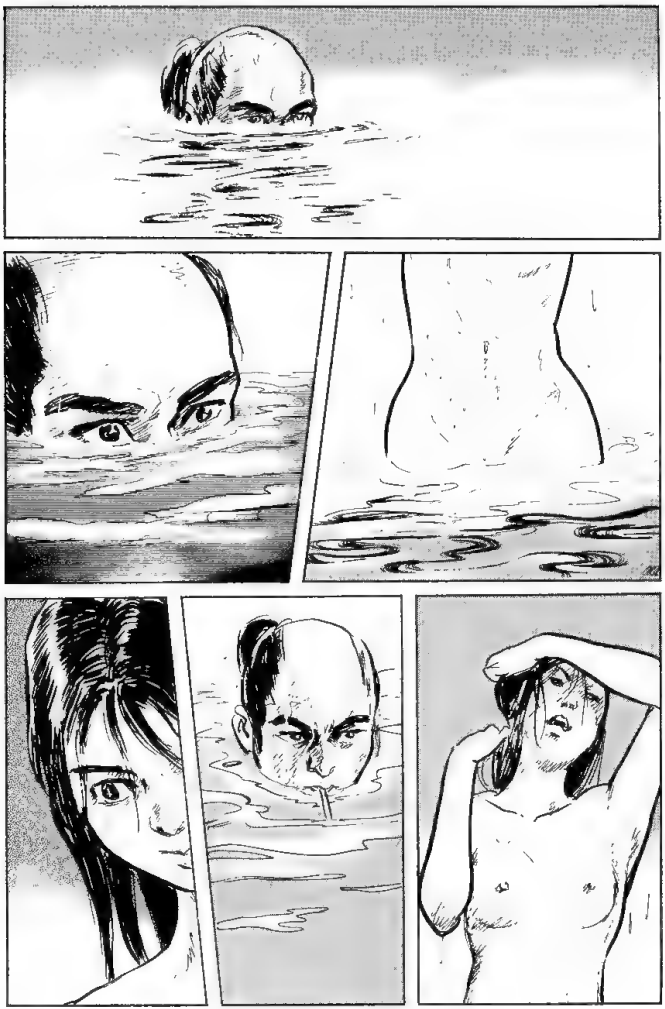
...WITH YOUR FACE LIKE THIS. IT MADE IT HARD TO FEEL BAD
YOU POINTED OUT THE PAINFUL TRUTH...
WHAT AN ABLE MAN YOU ARE.
CALMING MY FEELINGS BY INTENTIONALLY MAKING THE MONKEY FACE, YOU SPOKE YOUR MIND FRANKLY.
I BEG YOUR PARDON FOR MY INSOLENCE.


HANZŌ... I WONDER WHERE HE IS AND WHAT HE'S UP TO.
KIDEYOSHI COULD NOT HELP REMEMBERING...
...HOW HE'D SHOPPED AROUND FOR A MASTER WHO WOULD BE WORTH SERVING BEFORE HE CONCLUDED THAT NOBUNAGA WAS THE BEST, AND HOW, WITH RECKLESS ZEAL, HE HAD ENTERED THE ODA CLAN.

AND HE COULD NOT HELP BUT FEEL TOUCHED.
BUT HERE, HE WITNESSED THE FELLOWSHIP OF A MASTER AND A VASSAL WHO WERE BORN INTO THE RELATIONSHIP.
IN OTHER WORDS, HE CHOSE HIS MASTER.
HE ENVIED HANZO.
EVEN OCCURRED TO HIDEYOSHI THAT, PERHAPS, THE LIFE HE LED THUS FAR MIGHT HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE.
THERE WAS NO WAY NOBUNAGA WOULD SHED TEARS ON HIS BEHALF.

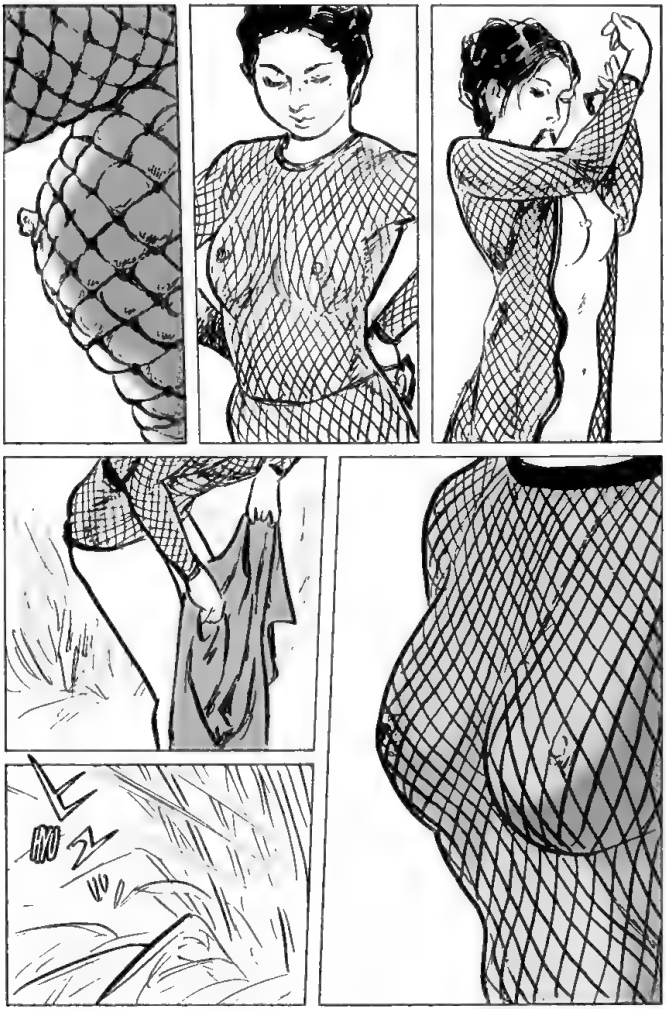


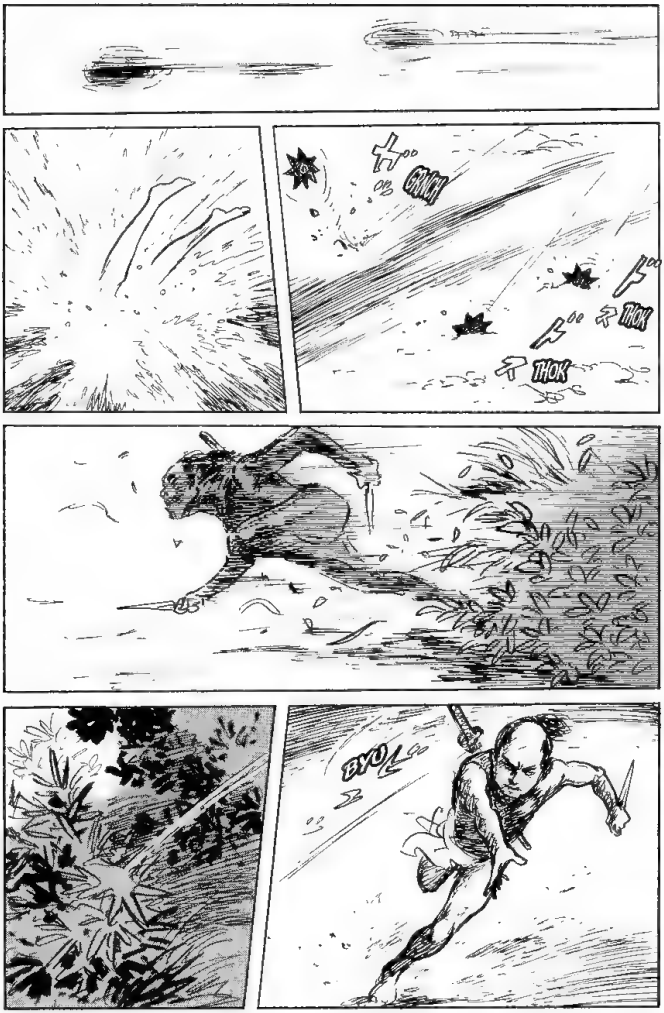
SUWA
NEAR
KURUMAYAMA.



GOOD. YOU CAN WASH YOUR HAIR TOO.

AUGH

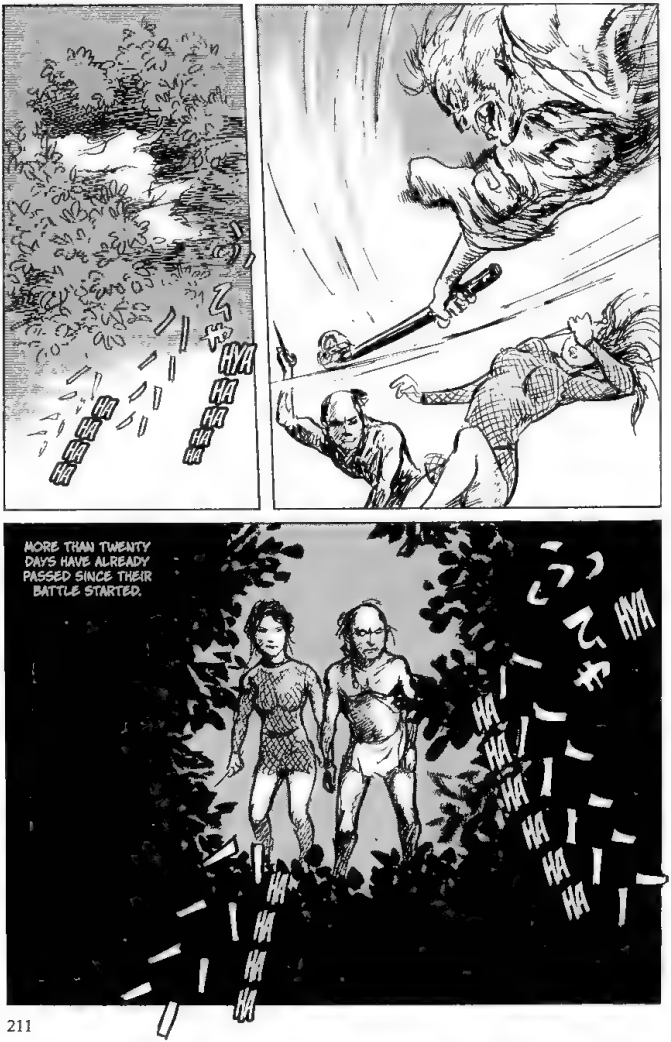

BZO


GRRCH
THOK
THOK
BYO

ZAAA

KUNKK
ヒュー
ヒュー

ヒュッ


HYA
HA
HA
H

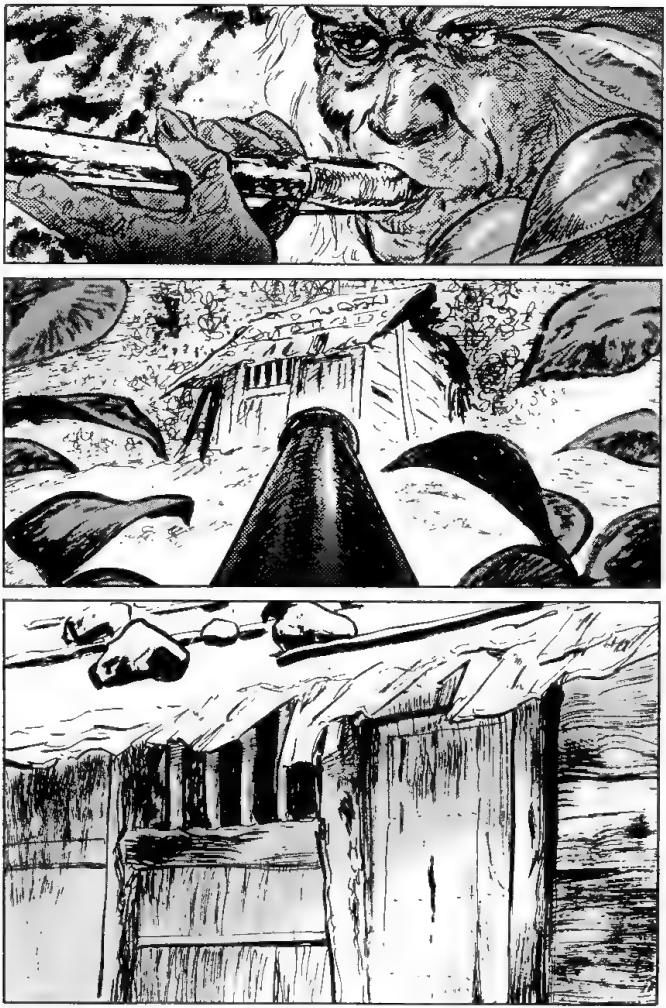
THE TWO OF THEM HAD TRACKED AND ATTACKED KITE KATŌ.

BUT HE WOULDN'T DISAPPEAR.
INSTEAD, HE ATTACKED THEM.

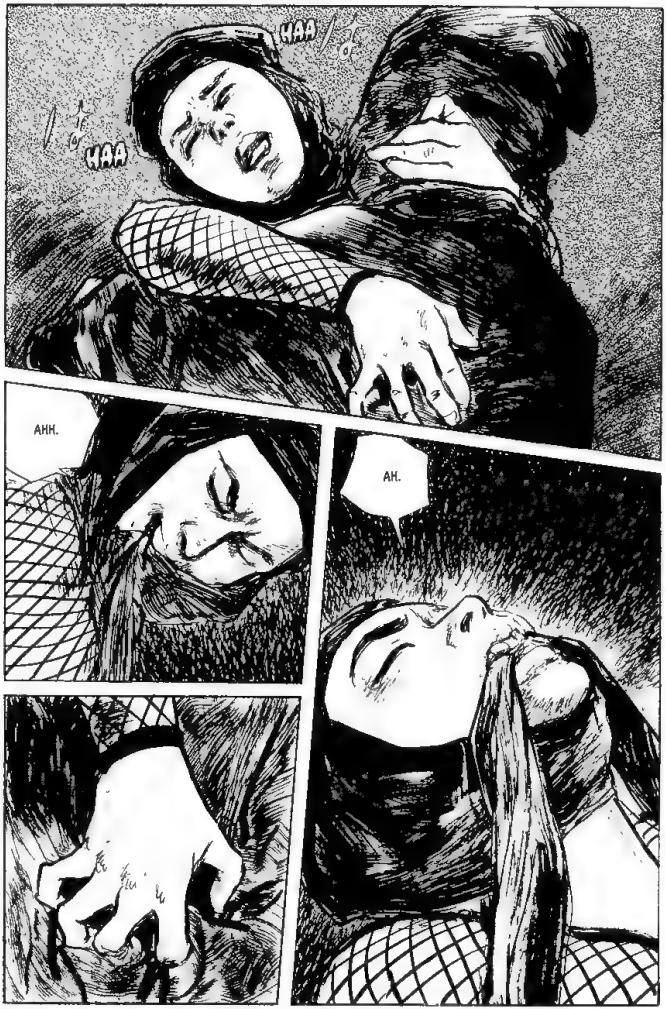
IT WOULD'VE BEEN NATURAL FOR HIM TO VANISH AND FOR THEM TO HUNT HIM DOWN AGAIN.

NOT ONLY THAT, THERE WAS AN OBVIOUS DISPARITY IN THEIR ABILITIES. IF KITE KATO WANTED, HE COULD'VE SENT THEM TO THEIR GRAVES LONG AGO.
BUT HE WAS ENJOYING HIMSELF.
THAT WAS WHY THE STRANGE FIGHT DRAGGED ON. THEIR POSITIONS WERE SWITCHED, AND THEY HAD TO WAIT AND DEFEND THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF TRACKING HIM DOWN.
IF THEY WERE AVERAGE SHINOBI, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WITHSTAND IT, AND THEY WOULD'VE EITHER SELF-DESTRUCTED OR FLED.

.AND WAITED FOR A DECISIVE BATTLE
BUT THEY HELD OUT.
STARVING AND SLEEPLESS, WITH THEIR NERVES FRAYED, TORMENTED BY FEAR AND ANXIETY, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED TEN DAYS.
THEIR LOVE AS HUSBAND AND WIFE
WHAT HELPED THEM ENDURE WAS
AH...



はぁ
HAA
はぁ
HAA
はぁ
HAA
はぁ
HAA
はぁ
HAA
はぁ
HAA


HAA
HAA
AHH.
AH.

UHH
AHH.
UH.
FLOP

...HE COULD NOT HELP BUT WONDER.
AND, AT THE SAME TIME...
BUT NOW, HE WAS BAFFLED.
KITE KATŌ HAD NO SCRUPLES ABOUT BOASTING THAT HE KNEW ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE.
NOT TO MENTION RIGHT WHEN I'M TAKING AN AIM AT THEM. HOW.. HOW CAN THEY.. DO THAT?
HOW LONG... DO THEY MEAN TO HUMP EACH OTHER?

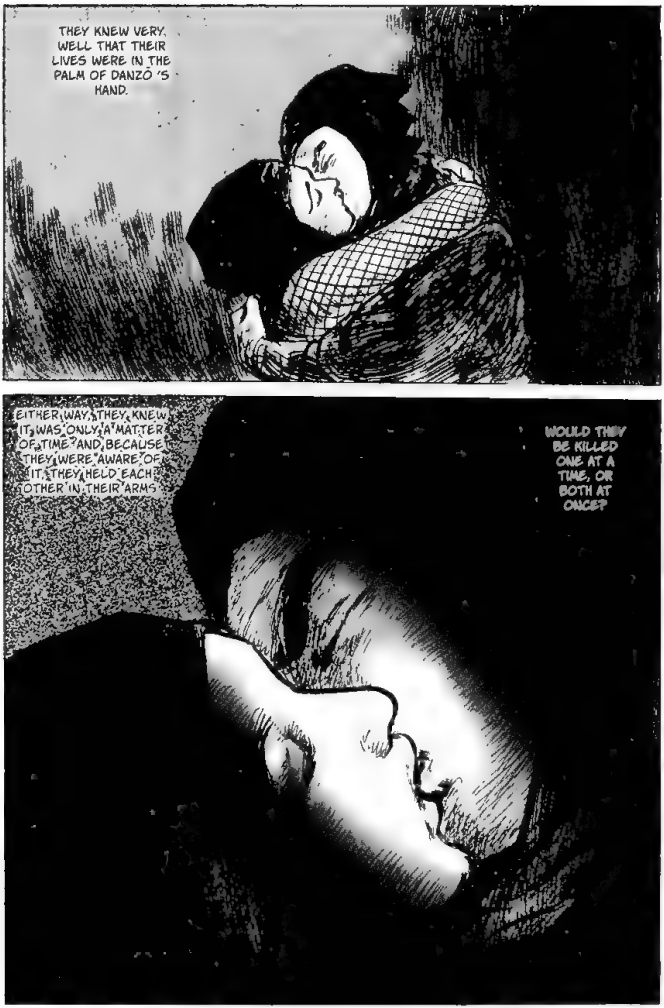
THE PRETTIER THE WOMEN, THE HIGHER THE PRICE.
WOMEN WERE WHAT HE BOUGHT WITH MONEY--IF NOT, WHAT HE STOLE AWAY.
HM... I DON'T GET IT.
IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WERE LIKE HORSES, COWS, AND FLOWERS.. THAT WAS WHAT WOMEN WERE TO DANZŌ.
THEY BORE BABIES, RAISED CHILDREN, COOKED MEALS, MENDED CLOTHES, AND GENERALLY LOOKED AFTER HIM.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
...THAT MADE A MAN PROTECT HIS WOMAN, MADE A WOMAN DEFEND HER MAN, AND MADE THEM FIGHT RISKING THEIR OWN LIVES FOR EACH OTHER.
BUT NOW, HE WAS BAFFLED BY THE LOVE...
NOR DID HE NEED TO THINK OF THEM.
HE HAD LIVED AS KITE KATO, AND HE NEVER THOUGHT MUCH ABOUT WOMEN IN HIS LIFE.
IF A WOMAN BECAME A BURDEN, HE WOULD NOT THINK TWICE ABOUT DESERTING HER. HE'D EVEN USE HER AS HIS SHIELD IF THAT HELPED HIM SURVIVE.
HE THOUGHT HE'D NEVER COMMIT SUCH A STUPID ACT AS DYING JUST TO PROTECT A WOMAN.

NOK
NOK
NO MATTER HOW I RACK MY BRAIN, I DON'T HAVE THE ANSWER

NO ONE EVER LOVED HIM, AND HE NEVER LOVED ANYONE. HE WAS THE KIND OF MAN WHO DID NOT KNOW WHAT IT MEANT TO ENDURE AND STRIVE BECAUSE OF LOVE.
HE WAS A SAD MAN WHO DIDN'T KNOW LOVE.
AAHHH!!
WOMEN ARE LIKE STARS, AREN'T THEY?

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR THE STARS ANYWAY?
JUST LIKE THE STARS, THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM TO PICK FROM WHY NOT TAKE A LOOK ONCE IN A WHILE AND SATISFY YOUR LUST ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?
THERE WAS SOMETHING I WANTED BUT DID NOT KNOW AND COULD NOT UNDERSTAND AFTER ALL.
AND IT WAS LOVE.


THEY KNEW VERY WELL THAT THEIR LIVES WERE IN THE PALM OF DANZŌ'S HAND.
EITHER WAY, THEY KNEW IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME. AND, BECAUSE THEY WERE AWARE OF IT, THEY HELD EACH OTHER IN THEIR ARMS.
WOULD THEY BE KILLED ONE AT A TIME, OR BOTH AT ONCE?

SO LONG AS THEY LIVED, THEY'D EMBRACE, LOVE AND FIGHT. EVEN IF THEY COULDN'T BEAT HIM, THEY MEANT TO FIGHT TO THE VERY END.
THEY WOULD BE HAPPY EVEN IF THEY WERE ATTACKED AND KILLED WHILE THEY WERE MAKING LOVE. WITHOUT THIS LOVE, THEY COULD NOT HAVE WEATHERED THE PAST TWENTY-PLUS DAYS.

THEY DIDN'T KNOW THAT THIS SINCERE LOVE WAS WHAT BEWILDERED DANZO.

WOULD THEY BEHAVE THE SAME EVEN IF SHE WAS UGLY?
NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES, I MUST FIGURE OUT THE ANSWER TO THIS MYSTERY.
SSST

スポ
SUPO
!!
URK.

A POISONED DART? MM.
DON'T OPEN YOUR EYE.
TSUKUMO, RELAX YOUR BODY COMPLETELY.

SPIT

BYU
BONK
IF YOU MOVE, THE POISON WILL TRAVEL FASTER JUST STAY STILL RIGHT THERE.

ISN'T IT USELESS TO CARE FOR SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE DEAD TOMORROW?

SHE IS ALIVE NOW
SHE'S NOT JUST A WOMAN SHE'S MY WIFE.
WHY DON'T YOU DESERT HER AND TRY TO SAVE YOURSELF?
WHY DO YOU PROTECT A WOMAN THAT MUCH?
...?!
SHE IS MY SECOND SELF
THEY'RE ALL THE SAME, AREN'T THEY?

IF YOU WERE INJURED WHAT WOULD YOU DO?
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING
I'D TREAT IT OF COURSE
MY WIFE AND I ARE ONE FLESH HER WOUND IS MY OWN
HUH ?!

I HAVE THE TIME RIGHT NOW.
EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO TREAT HER WOUND?!
WHEN MY WIFE IS SHOT, I WILL NOT LEAVE HER. I'M PREPARED TO DIE FOR IT.
I DON'T SENSE ANY MENACE.
WHEN I'M ATTACKING YOU?
LIKE A CAT THAT PLAYS WITH A MOUSE BEFORE KILLING IT, YOU ARE ENJOYING THIS.
MM!

IT WILL PERSIST DESPERATELY!
THE MOUSE MIGHT BE KILLED EVENTUALLY, BUT UNTIL THEN, IT IS STILL ALIVE.
BUT BECAUSE WE ARE UNITED AS HUSBAND AND WIFE, WE CAN ENDURE.
WHETHER IT'S A MAN OR A WOMAN WHO'S FRIGHTENED AND WISHES TO FLEE, THAT TERROR IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BEAR.
MY ART IS SEVERAL LEVELS SUPERIOR TO YOURS. I'M THE CAT, I SAY.
IT'S CLEAR WHO'LL WIN THIS BATTLE.
I JUST CAN'T GET IT.
THAT'S WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

NOT THAT I'D LET YOU ESCAPE. SO, YOU'D HAVE TO USE SOME REAL SKILL TO GET AWAY.
IN THAT CASE, ISN'T IT A BETTER STRATEGY FOR YOU TO TAKE FLIGHT AND WATCH FOR ANOTHER CHANCE?
ONE CAN PLAY DECOY TO LET THE OTHER ESCAPE. I AM ALONE. I CAN'T GO AFTER TWO PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME, AFTER ALL.
IF YOU WERE ALONE, YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO IT. BUT FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE TWO OF YOU.
BESIDES, ISN'T A WOMAN SUPPOSED TO THROW HERSELF AWAY TO REMAIN FAITHFUL FOR A MAN LIKE YOU?
THAT'S WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOU SERVE A MASTER. YOU MUST ASPIRE TO BE LOYAL, AND YOU MUST HAVE AMBITION TO BE SUCCESSFUL.
AS I'VE SAID MANY TIMES, WE ARE ONE FLESH.

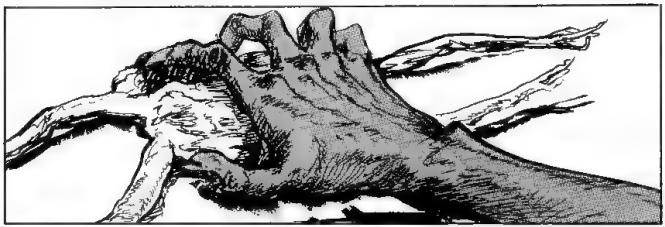
BUT IT'S NOT JUST FOR LOYALTY. IT APPLIES TO ANYTHING. TWO TOGETHER IS STRONGER THAN ONE ALONE.
OUR LOYALTY IS ALSO UNITED.
THESE DAYS, ISN'T A WIFE EXPECTED EVEN MORE TO CHOOSE SUCH A PATH FOR HER HUSBAND?
THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES FROM ANCIENT TIMES THAT SPEAK TO THIS.
IT'S OUR LOVE THAT UNITES US IN ONE FLESH.
...UNLESS THEY ARE TRULY ONE, THIS CAN'T BE POSSIBLE.
HOWEVER, UNLESS THE TWO ARE JOINED...

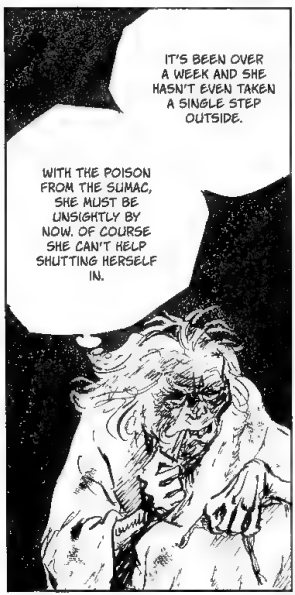
TAKING A GOOD WIFE, MAKING FINE CHILDREN, GROWING HIS CLAN BIGGER AND STRONGER, AND OFFERING ALL OF THAT TO HIS LORD IS WHAT TRUE LOYALTY IS.
DEATH ISN'T THE TRUEST FORM OF LOYALTY A VASSAL OFFERS TO HIS LORD.
YOU'RE MISTAKEN IN YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE WAY OF THE *SAMURAI*. BECAUSE YOU ARE TOO CAUGHT UP WITH WHAT'S ON THE SURFACE, YOU FAIL TO PERCEIVE THE INTRINSIC MEANING.
ENSURING THAT HIS CHILDREN, HIS GRANDCHILDREN, AND ALL HIS POSTERITY WILL SERVE HIS LORD--THAT IS TRUE LOYALTY.
DEATH IS ONLY ONE RESULT THAT LIES AT THE ULTIMATE END. IF SO, INSTEAD OF OFFERING DEATH, A VASSAL SHOULD SERVE HIS LORD AS LONG AS POSSIBLE BY STAYING ALIVE.

HOW COULD I ESCAPE ALONE, SACRIFICING HER!
THE FAITHFULNESS OF A WIFE IS TO BEAR HIS CHILDREN AND SUPPORT HIS CLAN!! AND I AM UNITED IN ONE FLESH WITH SUCH A WIFE.
...WELL, I'LL SEE TO IT THAT I DISCERN ITS STRENGTH TO MY SATISFACTION.
THIS UNION OF FLESH, THIS SO-CALLED LOVE...
IF DEATH TAKES HER, I WILL GO TOO.

IT WAS SUMAC ON THAT DART!
THIS WIFE OF YOURS WILL HAVE A FACE YOU WON'T WANT TO LOOK AT TWICE.

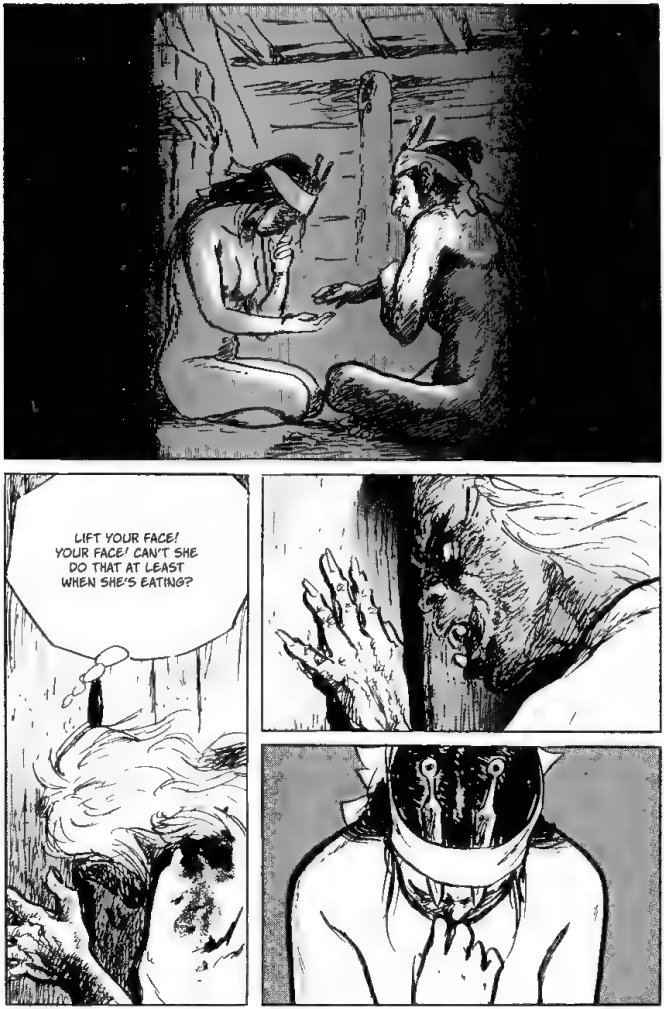
BYU



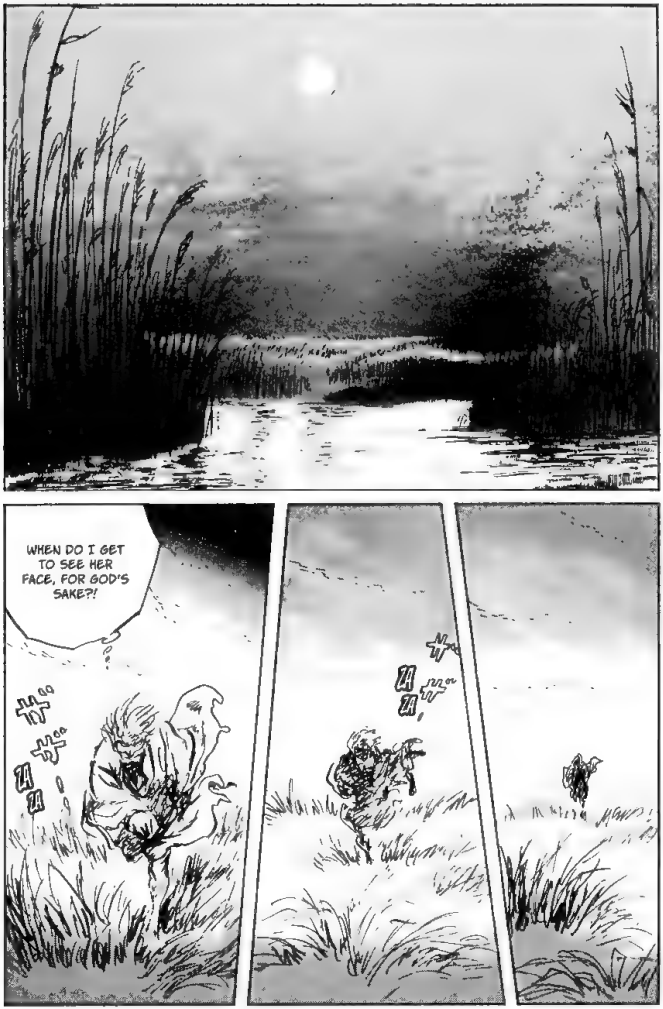

IT'S BEEN OVER A WEEK AND SHE HASN'T EVEN TAKEN A SINGLE STEP OUTSIDE.
WITH THE POISON FROM THE SUMAC, SHE MUST BE UNSIGHTLY BY NOW. OF COURSE SHE CAN'T HELP SHUTTING HERSELF IN.

BUT I WANT TO SEE IT.
I WANT TO SEE IT NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.
BUT SHE KEEPS HER FACE DOWN ALL THE TIME SO THAT I CAN'T EVEN CATCH A GLANCE.
WELL, I GUESS SHE WOULDN'T WANT HER HUSBAND TO SEE HER UGLY FACE. SHE CAN'T HELP THAT.
AHHH, I WANT TO SEE!
WHEN I IMAGINE HOW SUCH BEAUTY MUST'VE TURNED INTO A HIDEOUS MONSTROSITY... HEE HEE HEE.
I CAN'T STAND NOT SEEING IT.

I WILL SEE IT THIS TIME. I MUST!


LIFT YOUR FACE! YOUR FACE! CAN'T SHE DO THAT AT LEAST WHEN SHE'S EATING?

CRAP!
...TO SEE IT.
THE WAY THINGS ARE, I'D HAVE TO BURROW INTO THE GROUND...


WHEN DO I GET TO SEE HER FACE, FOR GOD'S SAKE?!
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA

I MUST SEE HER FACE!
I WANT TO SEE
I HAVE TO SEE
I STILL CAN'T SEE.
URRNG...
..SHE'LL BE UNDER HIM, LOOKING UP.
WHEN THEY'RE HUMPING.

あぁぁぁ
ぶぶぶぶ
あぁぁぁぁ

BUT REALLY, HOW CAN HE BANG A HIDEOUS-LOOKING WOMAN.
DAMMIT. FINE, I'LL JUST LURE THEM OUT!
HMMM.
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THEY'RE FAKING IT, EITHER.

フ
P
F
O
O
O
F

LISTEN CAREFULLY, YOU TWO! I'LL SHOW YOU THE ART OF FIRE-WALKING! IT IS THE MOST ARCANE AMONG THE SECRET ARTS WHICH I, KITE KATO, DEVISED AFTER YEARS OF STUDY!

AS SHINOBI, YOU SHOULD WATCH IT AT LEAST ONCE. IF YOU DON'T, YOU'LL NEVER GET TO SEE IT AGAIN!
DID YOU WATCH ME?!

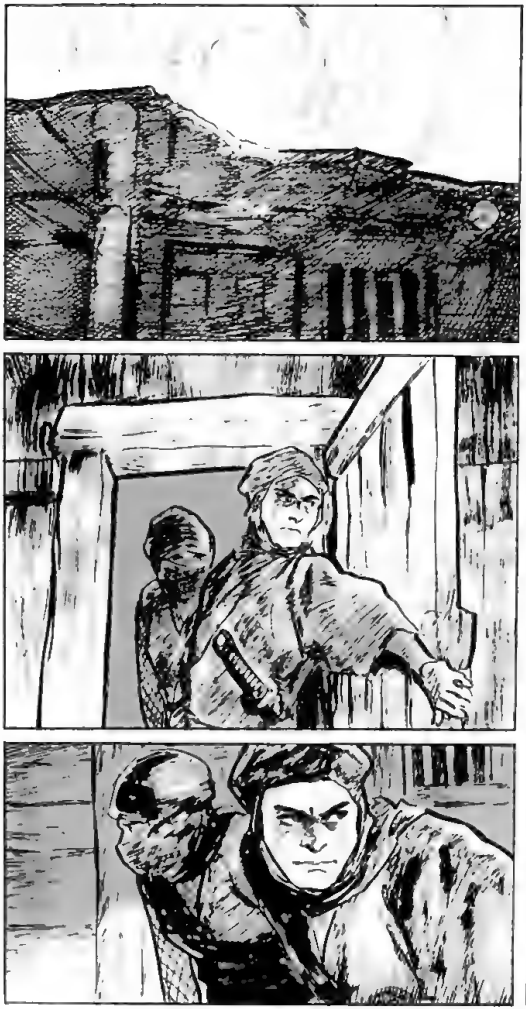
WHAT DO YOU THINK?! WHY DON'T YOU COME OUT AND WATCH ME CLOSE? OTHERWISE YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO MASTER THIS TECHNIQUE.
THIS TIME, I'LL SHOW YOU HOW I CAN SIT ON CHARCOAL MADE FROM BLAZING FIRES.

FURTHERMORE, IF YOU PUT ON CLOTHING MADE OF ASBESTOS, YOU WON'T BURN.
IF YOU POUR SALT WATER OVER YOUR HEAD, YOU WON'T BURN NOR FEEL ANY HEAT.
AH HA HA!!
IF YOU THROW SALT ON THE FIRE THAT TURNED TO CHARCOAL, YOU CAN SIT AND WALK ON IT AT WILL.
AWWW!
H... HOT...
URK... HE ALREADY KNEW!

FINE!
I'LL BURN DOWN THE SHACK!
MMGH!
I CAN'T HAVE FIRES START ATTRACTING PEOPLE...
THERE ARE TAKEDA *SAMURAI* AROUND HERE.
NAH, THAT WON'T DO.

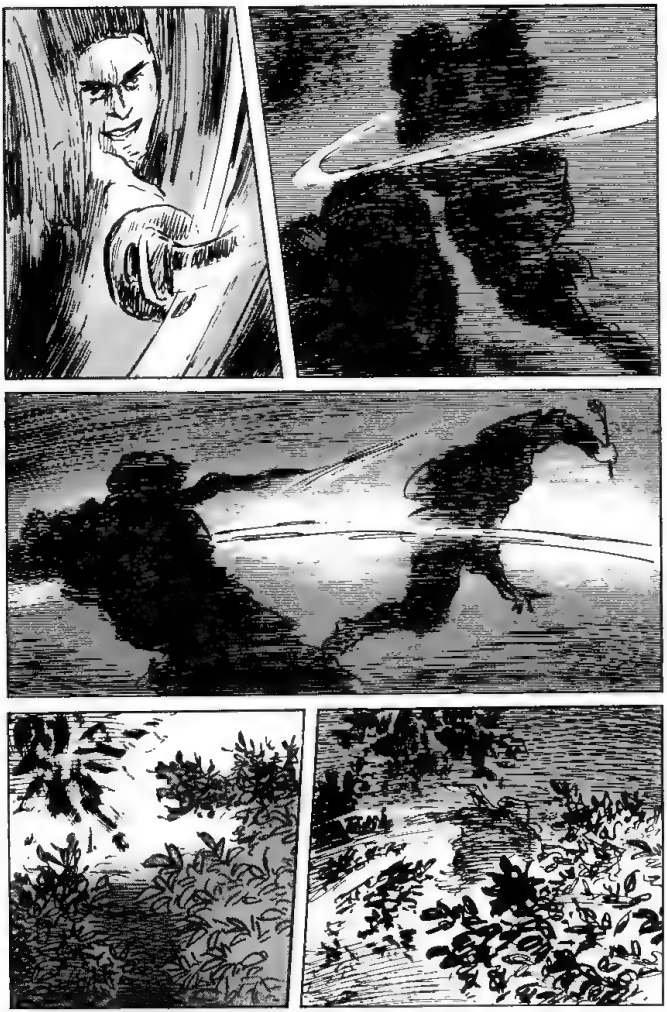
URNG. WHO WOULD'VE DREAMED HOW HARD IT COULD BE TO SEE A WOMAN'S FACE.
BUT IF THE WHOLE SHACK GOES UP, IT'S NO SMALL BONFIRE.
FIRE IS THE ONLY WAY TO GO.
URM... MM...
IT'LL STAND OUT!!
AH! WHAT OTHER MEANS...?
HM...

HYA HA HA HA HA. THAT'LL WORK AGAINST ME, TOO.
SHOULD I... DESTROY THEIR SOURCE OF FOOD AND WATER...?
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT HER FACE LOOKS LIKE NOW!
AHH, I WANT TO SEE.
IT MAKES ME WANT TO SEE EVEN MORE.
EVEN THE KITE KATŌ IS AT A LOSS!!
IT'S NO GOOD.
THE ART OF DISGUISE!! THAT'S IT!
MM!!


TWO
DAYS LATER
EARLY
AFTERNOON

HE'S COMING!!

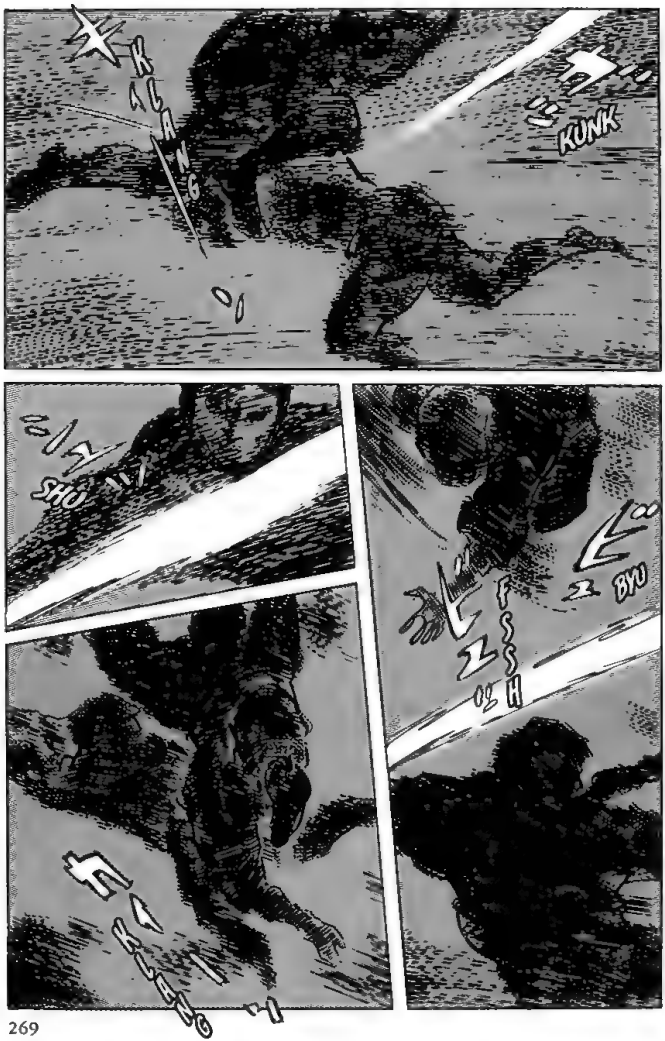
KUNK
thu!!!

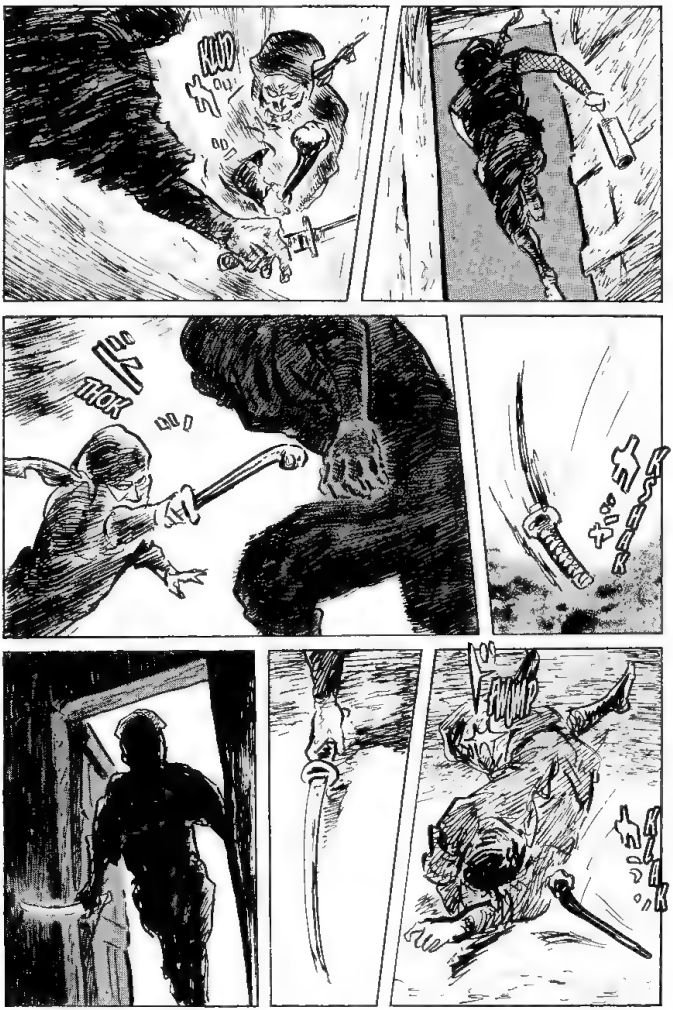


THE
FOLLOWING
DAY DUSK

ザザ
ザザ

TWO MORE DAYS LATER. NIGHT.


KUNK
SHU
BYU
FSSSH


KUD
THOK
FWUMP
KLAK

I SEE YOU!"

I GOT THE FULL VIEW!!
SHH
SHH
SHH
SHH
BUT I SAW THE SADNESS IN THE HEART BEHIND THE MONSTROSITY FOR REAL.
IF I TORE IT OFF, I WOULD'VE LET YOU PREPARE FOR IT, AND I COULDN'T HAVE GLIMPSED YOUR SAD, CONFUSED LOOK.
I GOT TO SEE IT WITHOUT KILLING OR WOUNDING YOU. YOU TOOK OFF YOUR HEAD COVERING ON YOUR OWN. THAT GIVES ME REAL PLEASURE IN SEEING YOUR FACE.
I SAW IT!!

DID YOU THINK I WAS HANZŌ? TO MAKE YOU BELIEVE I WAS, I USED THE ART OF DISGUISE AND PERSEVERED TILL TODAY!
HYU
HYU
DO

OW
OW
OW
OW
THE POISON WON'T KILL YOU, BUT IT WILL BE EXTREMELY PAINFUL.
THERE'S AN ANTIDOTE FOR IT.
EEK!
THE NEEDLES ARE POISONED.
YOU... YOU BEAT ME!
BUT IF YOU HEAL TSUKUMO'S FACE BACK TO THE WAY IT USED TO BE, I WILL GIVE YOU THE ANTIDOTE.
YOUR NOSE WILL SWELL, YOUR EYELIDS WILL DROOP, AND THEY'LL ROT.

IN THE PAST, I'VE TRIED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE ROTTING POISON OF IGA WAS MADE OF.
BUT...
SNIFF
SNIFF
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE USING HORSE DUNG TO CAUSE TETANUS, BUT IN THE END I COULD NOT CONCOCT AN ANTIDOTE.
IT WAS TO NO AVAIL.

IT SCARES ME TO THINK THAT IT'S IN MY OWN BODY.
SWALLOW TWO WITHOUT CHEWING
AM I TO EAT THEM TOO?
GULP
THANK GOODNESS. I WON'T BE ROTTING, THEN.

NOW, AS I PROMISED, LET ME HEAL YOU FROM THE SUMAC'S POISON.
AND YET, WE ARE HELPING EACH OTHER.
WE'RE ENEMIES WHO WILL HAVE TO SETTLE OUR FIGHT.
BUT HOW STRANGE THIS IS, INDEED.
OR LIKE THE FELLOW SUFFERERS WHO PITY EACH OTHER. WHATEVER IT IS, THERE'S NOTHING AS MYSTERIOUS AS OUR RELATIONSHIP. NO WORDS CAN EXPLAIN IT.
WE'RE LIKE BITTER ENEMIES IN THE SAME BOAT.

IT'S DIFFICULT, YOU KNOW. THERE'S AN ART TO PASTING THIS EXACTLY.
ALL RIGHT. LET ME FIX YOU.
FHEH HEH HEH.
NOW, RAISE YOUR FACE.

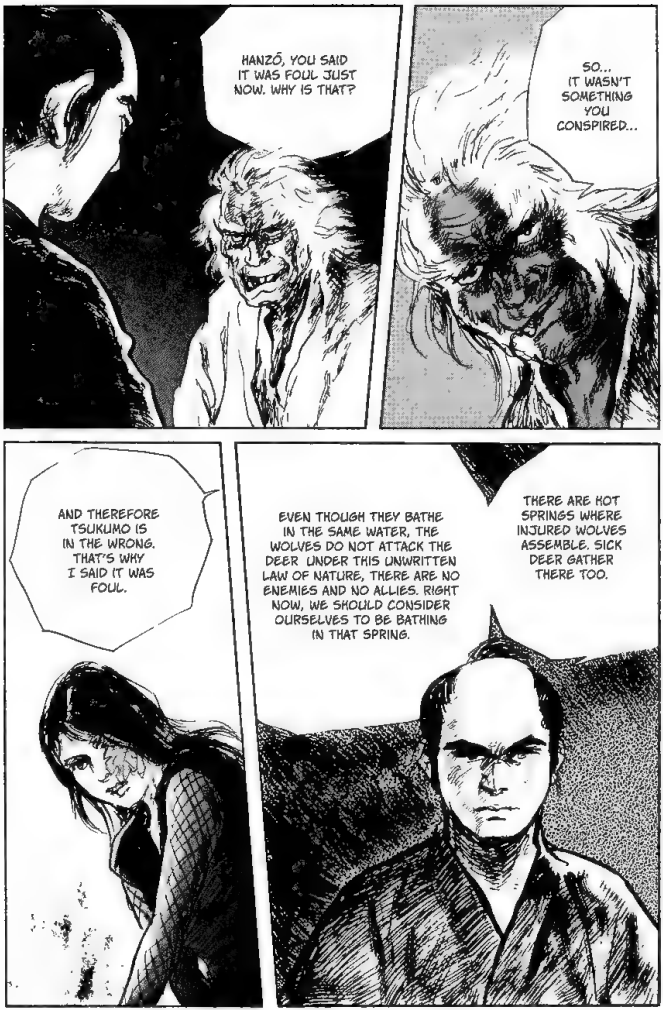
YOU SHOULD HEAL IN ABOUT TEN DAYS.

KUCHUFUFF
URG...
TSU... TSUKUMO!
REVENGE!

SMP
SMP

IT'S...
IT'S SO FOUL, TSUKUMO!
NO!
LET ME HELP!

SLAPP
STOP IT! HANZŌ!

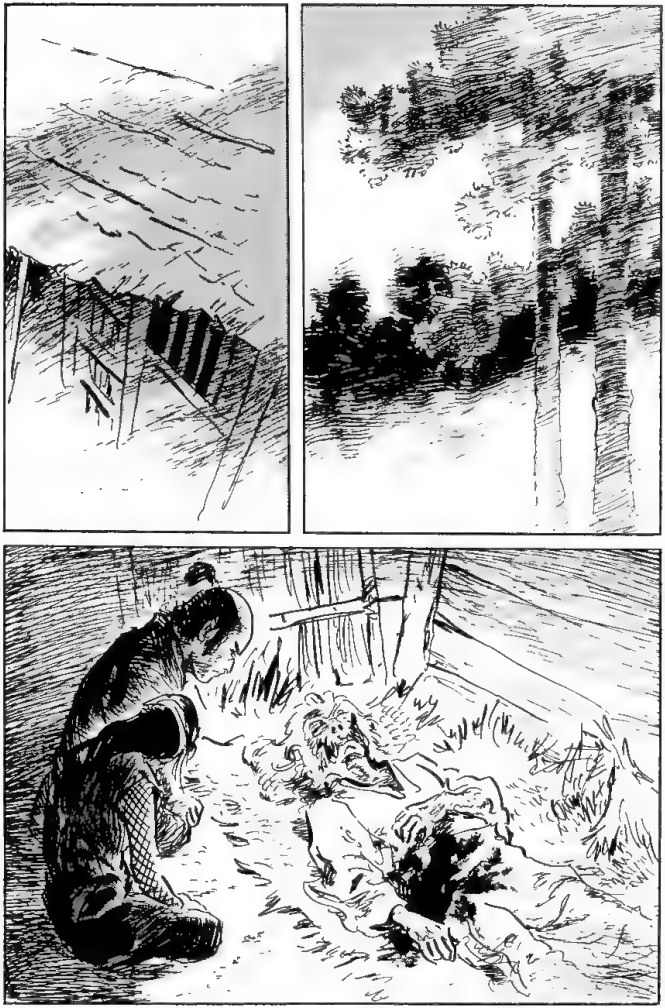

HANZŌ, YOU SAID IT WAS FOUL JUST NOW. WHY IS THAT?
SO... IT WASN'T SOMETHING YOU CONSPIRED...
AND THEREFORE TSUKUMO IS IN THE WRONG. THAT'S WHY I SAID IT WAS FOUL.
EVEN THOUGH THEY BATHE IN THE SAME WATER, THE WOLVES DO NOT ATTACK THE DEER. UNDER THIS UNWRITTEN LAW OF NATURE, THERE ARE NO ENEMIES AND NO ALLIES. RIGHT NOW, WE SHOULD CONSIDER OURSELVES TO BE BATHING IN THAT SPRING.
THERE ARE HOT SPRINGS WHERE INJURED WOLVES ASSEMBLE. SICK DEER GATHER THERE TOO.

はHA
はHA
はHA
HEE
HEH
HEE
HEH
HEE
HEH
HEH
HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA.

RUNNING THROUGH THE DARK, TRAVELING ACROSS THE WATER, AND FLYING INTO THE SKY, WE RULE WHERE NO EYES REACH AND WHILE OTHERS ARE ASLEEP.
WHAT YOU SAID APPLIES TO PEOPLE, BUT NOT TO *SHINOBI* LIKE US.
WHAT IS IT IF IT ISN'T TREACHEROUS, WHEN ALL WE DO IS OUTWIT THE HEARTS OF THE OTHERS?
THE ART OF *SHINOBI* MAKES IT ITS PRINCIPLE IN FOUL PLAY WE ARE *SHINOBI* PRECISELY BECAUSE WE EMPLOY BETRAYAL.
THEREFORE WHAT TSUKUMO DID WAS EXCELLENT AS *SHINOBI*, AND I AM DEFEATED AS *SHINOBI*.

HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
BUT HANZÔ, NOW THAT I'VE WATCHED YOU FOR SOME TIME, I'VE COME TO THIS ONE THOUGHT.

YOU'RE SO DIFFERENT THAT I CAN'T HELP FEELING THAT WAY.
I HAVE A FEELING THAT YOU WILL UNITE ALL SHINOBI-MONO INTO A BIG, SINGLE ORGANIZATION.
YOU'RE DIFFERENT.



A HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS...?!
...USING EVERY SECRET ART I HAVE AS SHINOBI.
YOU KNOW WHAT, HANZŌ? I MEANT TO BATTLE YOU FOR A HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS...
NO.
DO YOU KNOW WHY IT'S A HUNDRED AND EIGHT?
JOYA-NO-KANE RINGS OUT THE OLD YEAR SO THAT WE MAY ENTER THE NEW YEAR WITHOUT A HUNDRED AND EIGHT EARTHLY DESIRES.

SHIKU-HAKKU.
WHEN SOMEONE IS IN DISTRESS, WHAT WORD WOULD DESCRIBE SUCH A STATE?
I THOUGHT OF MARKING AN END TO THE LIFE I'VE LED SO FAR BY FIGHTING YOU FOR A HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS.
SHIKU IS THIRTY-SIX. HAKKU IS SEVENTY-TWO. YOU GET A HUNDRED AND EIGHT BY ADDING THE TWO NUMBERS.
I THOUGHT YOU WOULD MAKE A PERFECT SACRIFICE FOR ME TO START ANEW.

...I WANTED TO HAVE YOU AS MY STEPPING STONE TO SHARPEN MY MIND'S EYE, AND RE-POLISH MY ART BY COMPREHENSIVELY RECOMPILING ALL OF MY POWER, I WANTED TO MAKE IT MY NEW BEGINNING FOR TERMINATING SHINGEN.
I'VE GROWN OLD. I CAN'T PERFORM MY TECHNIQUES AS FREELY AS I USED TO. THAT'S WHY...
THE MORE WE FOUGHT, THE MORE YOU MADE ME THINK.
HUU

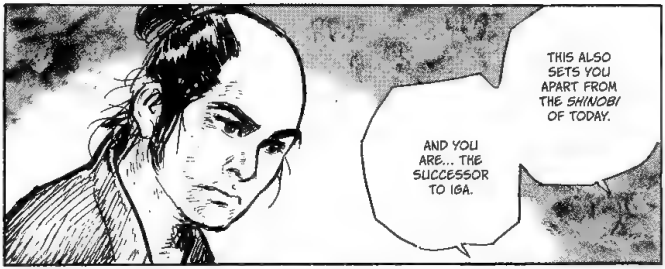
YOU ARE... VERY DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE OTHER SHINOBI.
HANZŌ, YOU ARE DIFFERENT... INDEED.
IF THIS ERA OF CIVIL WAR ENDS AND THE COUNTRY IS BROUGHT UNDER ONE SOVEREIGN POWER, AND IF A TIME OF TRANQUIL PEACE ARRIVES... WHAT WILL BECOME OF SHINOBI-NO-MONO THEN? AS I WATCHED YOU, I COULD NOT HELP THINKING ABOUT IT.
IF...
EVERY MAN HAS ONE SKILL TO MAKE A LIVING. ALL TEN OUT OF TEN SHINOBI TODAY WILL HAVE NO PLACE TO WORK.
HE'LL EITHER HAVE TO BECOME A PEASANT OR A BANDIT TO SURVIVE.

THIS IS BECAUSE THEY WEIGH SO THEY DON'T SLOW DOWN THE SPEED OF THE SWORD, AND THUS ARE MORE EASILY ABLE TO THROW THEM IN BATTLE.
AND IN THEIR ARMOURED SUIT OF SAMURAI ARMOUR, THEY WILL NOT KNOW WHERE THEY BEGIN.
IT'S AS CLEAR AS DAY THAT SAMURAI ARE NOT INVINCIBLE AND DESTROY THEMSELVES IN THE END.

BUT YOU ARE DIFFERENT.
YOU DON'T USE A WOMAN AS A PAWN TO BE DISCARDED. YOU SAY THE TRUE WAY OF VASSALS IS TO LET WOMEN BEAR CHILDREN FOR THEIR MASTERS, AND REMAIN LOYAL FOREVER. YOU STAND FIRM ON THAT PHILOSOPHY AND LOVE YOUR WIFE.
THAT DOESN'T MESH WELL WITH THE CURRENT WAY OF *SHINOBI*, WHICH PURPORTS ONE SKILL FOR ONE MAN WHO LASTS ONLY ONE GENERATION. IN FACT, YOUR APPROACH WILL HELP YOU RISE IN STATUS IN TIMES OF PEACE.
TSUKUMO...
W... WATER... PLEASE...

GULP
GULP
YOU FOUND A GOOD HUSBAND, TSUKUMO. IN OUR TIME... IT WAS UNTHINKABLE TO LOVE A KUNOICHI AND HAVE OFFSPRING WITH HER.
SHE WAS GOOD FOR EXTRACTING THE THOUGHTS OF OUR ENEMIES BY HAVING HER SLEEP WITH THEM AND AT TIMES, SHE WAS THE MEANS TO SLIT A FEW THROATS IN THE NIGHT.
A KUNOICHI WAS ONLY A TOOL FOR US.

...
...
DID YOU LOATHE ME? WERE YOU DRIVEN BY HATRED TO TERMINATE ME BECAUSE I WAS THE MAN WHO KILLED TSUKUMO'S FATHER?
YES.
HANZÔ!
I DIDN'T THINK SO. YOU SIMPLY FOLLOWED THE NATURAL COURSE OF EVENTS. AND ALSO, YOU THOUGHT IT WAS BETTER FOR YOUR MASTER IF SHINGEN REMAINED ALIVE FOR NOW.
INDEED, YOUR SHARP EYES SAW THROUGH ME WHEN YOU SAID I WAS ENJOYING OUR BATTLE.
AND YOU COULD CALMLY READ MY MIND.
THERE WAS NO HATRED IN THE WAY YOU BRANDISHED YOUR SWORD. AND BECAUSE NO FLASH OF ANGER BLINDED YOU, YOU COULD OBSERVE ME WELL.
...
...


THIS ALSO SETS YOU APART FROM THE *SHINOBI* OF TODAY.
AND YOU ARE... THE SUCCESSOR TO IGA.

...IGA ALONE WILL PROSPER... AS A LARGE ORGANIZATION.
YOUR FATHER, JŌKAN, IS A *SHINOBI* OF TODAY. BUT ONCE IT IS YOUR TURN TO LEAD, AND IF IEYASU ENDS UP RULING THE NATION ..

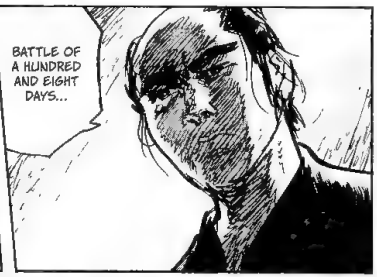
THERE'S A STRONG CHANCE FOR IT TO HAPPEN!
IT'S POSSIBLE!

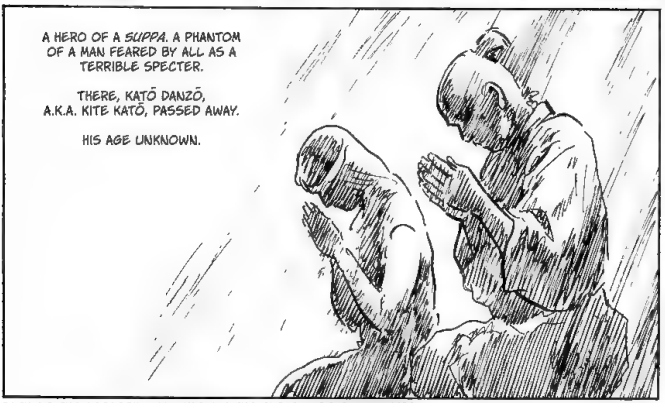
H... HOW CAN THAT BE...

SHINGEN IS STUCK BECAUSE OF THE DRAGON CALLED UESUGI AT HIS BACK GATE.
HŌJŌ IS NO MORE THAN A FROG. THEY HATE TO LEAVE THEIR SWAMP.
BECAUSE OF THAT TEMPER OF HIS, NOBUNAGA WON'T LAST LONG. ONE OF HIS VASSALS IS SURE TO GUT HIM WHILE HE'S ASLEEP.
THAT MEANS, IEYASU IS THE ONE WHO WILL BE IN POSITION TO MOVE MOST FREELY.
THE CRUCIAL MOMENT IS WHEN THE TREE WHOM YOUR MASTER LEANS UPON FALLS-- I MEAN, AT THE TIME NOBUNAGA DIES.
BUT BE CAREFUL.
THAT'S WHAT WILL LEAD YOU TO THE ROAD FOR YOUR TOMORROW.
THAT'S THE MOMENT! THE QUESTION IS HOW YOU'LL RUN AS YOU CARRY YOUR MASTER.

YOU MIGHT HOLD RESPECT FOR HIM, BUT SO LONG AS HE LIVES, THERE'S NO CHANCE OF RULING THE NATION.
ONE MORE THING. TERMINATE SHINGEN!
HANZŌ!
ARE YOU TRYING TO RILE ME, SO THAT I'LL FULFILL YOUR AMBITIONS?
MY... BOY... HANZŌ.
BURY MY BODY UNDER AN OLD TREE, WILL YOU?
IN ALL MY LIFE, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHOM I'VE FELT THE CLOSENESS OF KIN.

...LIKE DEAD
ON THE
FIELD


BATTLE OF A HUNDRED AND EIGHT DAYS...


A HERO OF A SUPPA. A PHANTOM OF A MAN FEARED BY ALL AS A TERRIBLE SPECTER.
THERE, KATŌ DANZŌ, A.K.A. KITE KATŌ, PASSED AWAY.
HIS AGE UNKNOWN.

GLOSSARY

ashigaru
Foot soldiers of medieval Japan.

ayakashi
A mask used in *noh* theater that represents a vindictive or violent ghost, god, or powerful warrior.

chants
Rin = strength, *pyō* = channel, *tō* = harmony, *sha* = healing, *kai* = sense of danger, *jin* = reading of thoughts, *retsu* = control space and time, *zai* = sky or elements control, *zen* = enlightenment, *akuma kōfuku* = demons surrender, *onteki taisan* = sworn enemies put to rout, *shichinan sokumetsu* = seven adversities disappear immediately, *shichifuku sokushōhi* = seven fortunes rise at once.

chūgen
A samurai's manservants.

diamond realm (vajradhatu)
In Vajrayana Buddhism, the diamond realm (vajradhatu) is a metaphysical space inhabited by the five wisdom Buddhas.

habu
Any of four species of poisonous snakes found in the Ryukyu Islands, Japan.

Hachiman
The Shinto god of war.

Jiang Taigong
A Chinese semi-mythological figure, who helped King Wen and his son turn over the Shang dynasty and establish the Zhou dynasty.

jiji
Grandfather.

joya-no-kane
A night watch bell at temples that tolls at midnight on New Year's Eve.

jūton
Escaping by the means of animals.

kekkai
A term used in Buddhism. Here it appears to mean a barrier or field of some sort that cloaks or protects the area.

King Di Xin of Shang
The last king of the Shang dynasty.

King Wu of Zhou
The first sovereign of the Chinese Zhou dynasty.

kishaku
A small magnetic iron piece which ninja used to find direction by making it float on water.

kuji
Kuji literally means "nine letters." Kuji-in is a specialized form of Shinto meditation.

kunoichi
Female ninja.

kura
May represent "home," "storehouse," "fortune," or "rank."

Kurumayama kogen
Mt. Kurumayama highlands.

makibishi
Small, spined caltrops used by ninja to deter pursuit.

mitsumono
A system of three types of warriors who specialized in information gathering established by Takeda Shingen.

mizugumo
Translates to "water spider."

mono
Person.

"om vajra sattva hum"
The Vajrasattva mantra of purification, healing, and transformation. Used for purifying all past and present negativity.

oyakatasama
A term used to address the head of the clan by the clan members. It translates to "house lord."

rokujintsu
Six supernatural powers of Buddha.

san
Scatter.

shiku-hakku
"Four sufferings eight sufferings." The four are birth, aging, illness, and death. The remaining four that make up the eight are parting with the beloved, association with the distasteful, failure to achieve the desired, and psychosomatic suffering. The Japanese term shiku-hakku is often used to mean extreme hardship.

shū
Gather.

Suwa, Yorishige
(d. 1542) Was lord of Kuwabara castle when it was attacked by Takeda Shingen in 1542. Suwa surrendered and was escorted to Takeda's capital at Kōfu under peaceful pretexts, but was then forced to commit suicide.

uchine
Throwing arrow/dart.

womb realm (garbhakosa)
In Vajrayana Buddhism, the womb realm (garbhakosa) is the metaphysical space inhabited by the five wisdom kings.

yotsutake
Literally translates to "four bamboos." It's a clapper.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

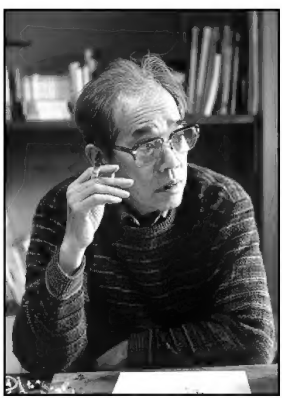
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



It's a battle of ninja vs. ninja, with all the stops pulled out and every trick written in the book. Well, almost every trick. Our protagonist/ninja Hanzō's young ninja wife, Tsukumo, must avenge her father's death at the hands of another shadow warrior. But he's as crafty as they come. This mystical, imaginative face-off consumes all three hundred plus pages of this action-stuffed volume. Pitting youth against wisdom, Hanzō and Tsukumo must show why they are the formidable future of Edo-era Japan's dark servants. Patience and cleverness and sheer will determine the difference between life and death.

Published in the popular pocket-sized manga format, *Path of the Assassin* packs historical fiction and fine art in yet another classic samurai series from the masters of samurai manga, Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima.

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams, Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA

半蔵の門

darkhorse.com